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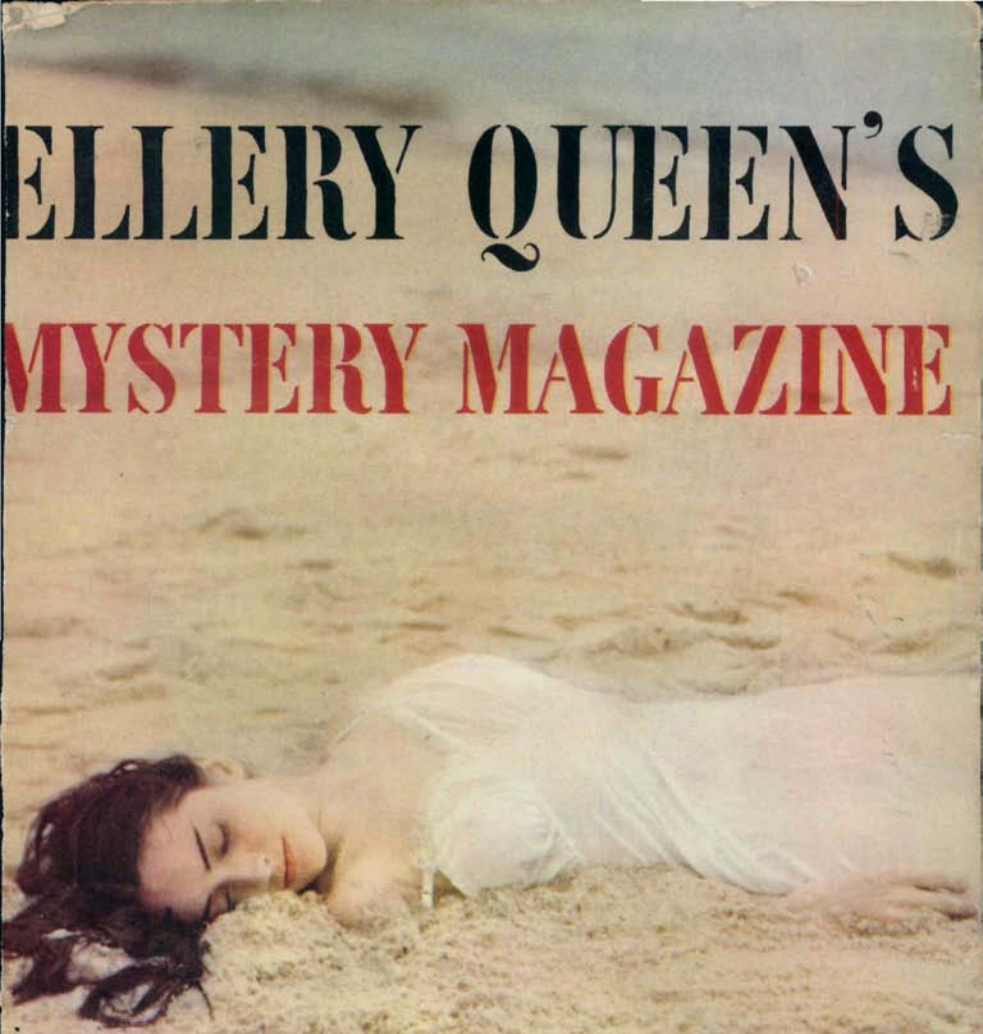

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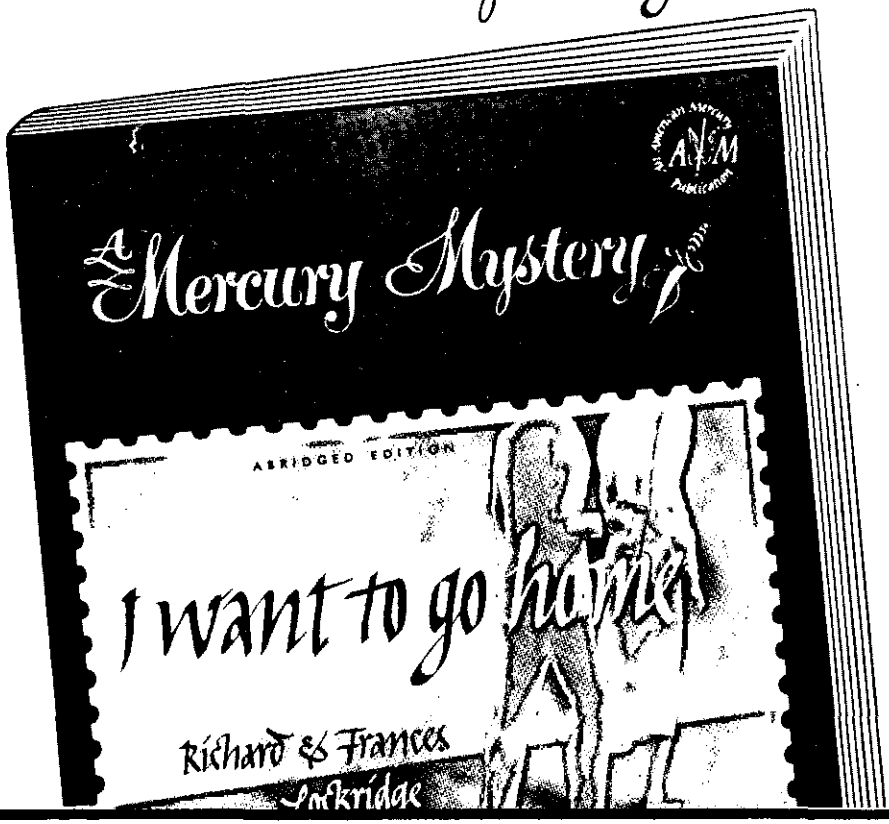

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THE PSYCHIATRIC CRIME STORY
DOUBLE EXPOSURE — *Ben Hecht* — 3

THE FUTURISTIC DETECTIVE STORY
CRISIS, 1999 — *Fredric Brown* — 12

THE UNORTHODOX CRIME STORY
HOW PEARL BUTTON WAS KIDNAPED — *Katherine Mansfield* — 26

THE SPECIALIST DETECTIVE
RIDING THE GHOST — *Harl Cook* — 30

THE PROBLEM STORY
QUERY — *"Seamark"* — 49

SPEAKING OF CRIME
THE SMILING ENGLISHMAN — *Anthony Boucher* — 58

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DETECTIVE STORY
THE THIRD MAN — *Meredith Nicholson* — 61

THE HUMOROUS CRIME STORY
THE BURGLAR'S STORY — *W. S. Gilbert* — 79

TEC TINTYPE
GUESS WHO? — *Talbot C. Hatch* — 85

LEAVES FROM THE EDITORS' NOTEBOOK
QUEEN'S QUORUM: PART THREE — *Ellery Queen* — 87

THE DETECTIVE STORY OF THE 'NINETIES
THE VANISHING DIAMONDS — *M. McDonnell Bodkin* — 94

THE PROFESSIONAL DETECTIVE AT WORK
MURDER IN ONE SCENE — *Q. Patrick* — 112

THE GAMBLING DETECTIVE STORY
BEGINNER'S LUCK — *Percival Wilde* — 120

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5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1949.

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: BEN HECHT

Surely Ben Hecht needs no introduction. Child-prodigy violinist, circus acrobat, theater owner, reporter, novelist, foreign correspondent, columnist, newspaper publisher, playwright, short-story writer, scenarist, motion picture producer — to mention only some of his vocations and avocations in rough chronological order . . . Mr. Hecht is a graduate, so to speak, of what is called in literary circles the "Chicago Group" — the group which included Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Carl Sandburg, Floyd Dell, and others. Today he is one of the best-known writers in America, a man who commands a fabulous salary in Hollywood, and who can write a blue-streak — tough or sentimental, lusty or romantic, but always with sharp, shrewd irony, and often with a sort of brimstone brilliance.

"Double Exposure" is a brisk, authoritative, witty example of the modern psychiatric crime story — one might even say, in spades. Mr. Hecht's original title was "Some Rather Evil People" — which certainly described the characters. When we suggested changing the title to "Double Exposure," Ben Hecht replied, with characteristic charm, "It sounds like a winsome title."

Concerning the origin of the story itself, Mr. Hecht's mind, he claims, is a blank. (We doubt that vigorously!) Psychoanalysts have always fascinated Ben — they always seemed to him the finest sort of potential villains. Imagine, asks Ben with his pawky humor, what fine blackmailers psychoanalysts would make? Ben can't understand how so wonderfully equipped a set of characters as psychoanalysts keep out of the criminal news columns; but apparently they are all a gentle tribe, never given to skulduggeries. At least, Mr. Hecht has never known of a psychoanalyst who was guilty of any crime other than tangling himself up in cockeyed terminologies.

So, knowing of no psychiatrist in real life guilty of any major crime, Mr. Hecht cannot resist analyzing "some rather evil people" and exposing their criminal compulsions . . .

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

by BEN HECHT

DR. HUGO handed me a newspaper as I entered his Park Avenue apartment, and said, "Sit down and read that story. I'm in a rotten situation and I need some advice."

Under the headline, "Bride Slays

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Noted Psychiatrist on Honeymoon," the story related the shooting of Dr. Caleb Mudie by Felicia Mudie in a Miami Beach Hotel. The photographs illustrating this unhappy event revealed a middle-aged, baldish man with thick eyebrows, and a voluptuous young dancer in long black hose. Her heavy lips were parted in what seemed to be a mood of chronic delight.

"Quite a tale," I said.

"Full of inaccuracies," Dr. Hugo said. "Mudie was not a psychiatrist. He was a neurologist. And not remotely noted. Except for stupidity. A man of even the most rudimentary intelligence seldom gets himself murdered on a honeymoon. Will you have a drink and make yourself comfortable — and control your desires to interrupt and shine in my eyes as a literary man of great astuteness? I know you are. That's why you're here. I have a story to tell you — a rather curious story — in which I may be the villain and not the hero, as I like to imagine myself. In addition to giving me advice you'll decide that, too, of course."

Dr. Hugo handed me my drink and I nodded with some irritation at my tall and unctuous host and his master-mind mannerisms. There was, as always, a gentle smile of triumph and derision on his once handsome face — a face that reminded me of an expensive but overused handkerchief. It was a smile that said, "Life is a scurvy business — but let's pretend it isn't."

I had never been able to decide whether Dr. Hugo was an eminent psychiatrist or a rogue with a vocabulary. His wit seemed too sharp for a medical man and I shuddered at the prospect of ever becoming his patient. It would be like confiding one's symptoms to a blackmailer. There was, however, a soiled sort of charm about the man. His mop of rumpled graying hair managed somehow to signal fellowship as well as chicanery. It was a fellowship that made me nervous, for it was like being winked at by the Devil.

"The story," said Dr. Hugo, "begins some time ago. The deceased bridegroom and I interned together and shared an office when we started practice. It took me five years to shake loose of him. He was inclined to embrace his betters like a squid — with eight arms. A medical charlatan and a human cypher but with enough conceit to have served a dozen geniuses. Among his strongest convictions was the fancy that he was irresistible to women." Dr. Hugo looked tenderly at the murder headline. "A fancy," he added, "that has now been permanently canceled.

"You never met Felicia," he went on. I shook my head. "A woman of great animal charm," he said. "with a paranoid temper hidden in her childlike smile. As her recent activity testifies. I shall do everything I can, of course, to see that she is not punished for her misconduct."

"That's going to be a bit difficult," I said, "judging from that story."

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"Not at all," Dr. Hugo said. "I shall take the witness stand in her defense when the time comes. I doubt if any jury will convict her — any more than you will — after hearing me out."

An air of hidden, antic excitement came into his words as he continued.

"You see, I could have prevented Caleb's murder. A few words to Felicia before the mismated couple took off on their macabre honeymoon, and the pompous little man would still be alive. But Caleb outwitted me. He left a day earlier than he had announced. He didn't want me saying those few words to Felicia. Who knows, perhaps I was silent because I foresaw what might happen. Being very much in love with Felicia myself, it would have been quite a clever thing to let him go off and be murdered by her, now, wouldn't it? An interesting way of disposing of a rival, don't you think? With no legal responsibility attached and —" Dr. Hugo chuckled. "I'm afraid I'm boasting," he resumed. "I'll put it this way: I am certainly not displeased to lose Caleb as a friend or patient."

"I didn't know he was a patient of yours," I said. "What was his trouble?"

"There was nothing wrong with him at all," said Dr. Hugo. "Such deficiencies as Dr. Mudie possessed are not for the art of medicine. Not even I know of any cures for a blatant and slobbering ego. But I have a number of doctors of his sort who bring me fake neuroses for treatment. Their sole object is to pick my brain and misuse some of my wisdom on their own unfortunate patients.

"In Caleb's case, however, the brain-picking was mutual. I kept myself informed, while analyzing him, on the progress of his courtship of Felicia. Of course, he was eager enough to help me along there. The foolish fellow imagined that he had stolen Felicia from me and that the details he had to offer of their growing love were coals of fire. Like all stupid men he hated his betters even while robbing them. But let me assure you, he was committing no robbery. Felicia had been stolen from me a full year ago."

Dr. Hugo sighed and allowed me to observe a spasm of pain in his soiled and clever eyes.

"A man can lose a woman like Felicia again and again," said Dr. Hugo, "and still remain in love with her. She belongs to that rare type of female whose allure is not dependent on virtue, and whose charms, in fact, seem only refreshed by their misuse. They lie and cheat and vow eternal love all in one breath. And, somehow, remain as innocent as children playing games. Yes," Dr. Hugo sighed, "to know Felicia is to mistrust her, forgive her, and desire her forever.

"You may wonder," he continued, "how so unappetizing a fellow as Dr. Mudie ever made any headway with our exotic Felicia. The answer, I'm afraid, is that Felicia was the kind of Venus who could never scorn a worshipper with an incense pot. I say

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'was' because I'm sure her present troubles have cured her of this failing."

Dr. Hugo drank, then studied the story of his rival's murder for a moment, his eyes turning mockingly to the dead man's photograph as he continued.

"Yes, to Felicia a man in love with her was like a new dress. She couldn't resist trying it on, however unbecoming it might be; trying it on, strutting a bit, and then discarding it. The poor child was too giddy with this game-playing to know that Caleb was a hair shirt rather than a new dress. I could have told her, but warning Felicia of danger was always a waste of time. She would much rather love what she shouldn't — which is, perhaps, the reason she once loved me.

"As for Caleb, from the moment he fell in love with her — I call it love because this is after office hours — his single, blinding purpose was to make her as miserable and unhappy as possible. He did this by dumping a psychotic jealousy on her which should have thoroughly revolted her. Of course, it didn't. Women are usually fascinated by a jealous man. He inspires them with a sense of their powers which a civilized fellow, like myself, seldom does. And he adds spice and danger to their deceptions.

"And also," Dr. Hugo smiled, "Caleb's grubby jealousies took Felicia's mind off her true troubles. These were considerable. She was still in love with the man who had stolen her from me. Desperately in love, as usually happens to women like Felicia when they find a man they can't have entirely. The drawback is usually a wife in the background."

Dr. Hugo paused and added in a quiet, dramatic voice,

"You've heard of Hans Wienerz, of course?"

"No," I said.

Dr. Hugo frowned.

"Really?" he said. "Don't you read the papers?"

"Who is he?" I asked.

"Hans Wienerz, the concert violinist," he said. "He had his day in the press only recently."

"I don't go to violin concerts," I said. "I seldom read the papers when I'm writing. And Hans Wienerz is unknown to me."

"This is a little unexpected," Dr. Hugo smiled. "I shall have to introduce Hans to you — in full. He is an important part of my story — and another reason for doubting whether I'm its villain or its hero. Mr. Wienerz, who stole Felicia's love from me, was one of those storm-tossed husbands who are always married to the wrong woman. He was a thick-necked, glowering fellow with an empty skull who could play the violin superbly. A sort of Golem with electric fingers. He detested Madam Wienerz but nothing could induce him to leave her. He explained to Felicia that his wife had vowed to kill him if he ever abandoned her for another woman and, of course, this was all Felicia had to know to become a

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slave of love. Something she couldn't have — a wife in the background with a gun — a lovelorn oaf who couldn't dispel the situation in words — and a violin that sang to her out of Heaven. I couldn't very well compete with so wondrous a scenario, so I did the next best thing — retired gracefully and waited hopefully.

"You can see why I didn't mind Dr. Mudie's idiotic courtship." Dr. Hugo smiled. "It was, in fact, a sort of comic relief. For while she was vowing love eternal and fidelity everlasting to Caleb's lunatic jealousies, I knew Felicia's heart was with her fiddler. She had given him up for the time being because of his refusal to brave his wife's threat of gunplay and run away with her. But her eyes always filled with tears at his name and she sneaked off to his concerts and followed him in the streets like a creature in a trance."

Dr. Hugo paused and looked at me with a curious, unspoken insistence. He had a hypnotic trick of compelling the right questions in a listener and I heard myself saying, vaguely:

"I'm waiting for Dr. Mudie to discover that Felicia loved another."

"That he did," Dr. Hugo said.

"As part of your treatment of his neurosis, I imagine," I said.

"Oh, no, I didn't tell him." Dr. Hugo looked mockingly at me.

"Who did?" I asked.

"Madam Wienerz," he answered. "She was being treated by Dr. Mudie for severe headaches."

"Really," I said. "That's rather odd — finding Madam Wienerz a Mudie patient. As a writer I always frown on coincidence."

"It wasn't coincidence," Dr. Hugo said. "I sent Madam Wienerz to Caleb. Which is one of the things that worries me." His voice grew mocking again. "For you may decide that I was responsible for what happened. Knowing Madam Wienerz, through my own sorrows, and knowing Dr. Mudie, it might seem to you that I arranged and precipitated the Wienerz tragedy in order to rid myself of rival Hans."

"I see," I said. "Felicia no longer loves the fiddler."

"No, I don't think she does," Dr. Hugo said. "At least, I hope not. And if she does, I don't think it matters any more."

Dr. Hugo was enjoying some sort of joke, and he continued:

"Caleb hadn't any idea of Madam Wienerz's place in his life or of Felicia's place in Madam's. He knew only that she suffered from very bad headaches and that she believed they were caused by her worry over her husband. She suspected that he had resumed his attentions to the woman who had already once ruined their marriage.

"On her third visit Caleb discovered that his hysterical patient carried a gun in her purse, and this seemed to excite him, for he told me about it. He seemed fascinated by a type of jealousy obviously superior to his own. Well," Dr. Hugo smiled, "a week later the fat was in the fire. Dr.

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Mudie, who was always more gossip than medico, asked Madam Wienerz if she knew the name of her rival. And Madam gave him quite an answer, as you may imagine. She said the Other Woman was a wanton dancing girl named Felicia Gauer.

"Caleb brought me the news the same evening. He fumed for an hour. I was a scoundrel; Felicia was a monster. How long had I known? He saw through my sending Madam Wienerz to him. He should have suspected any largesse from me — which was true. I would as soon have thought of sending a patient to a phrenologist as to Caleb Mudie.

"I listened, refused to answer questions, and let him shout himself hoarse. He left finally and I imagined I knew what was going to happen. Felicia, trapped by Caleb's windfall of information, would undoubtedly admit the truth — or part of it — and the ungainly romance between the two would be over. You may well imagine I had no objection to such a finale."

"I can't see how it could make much difference to you, one way or another," I said. "There would still be Mr. Wienerz — as a rival. In fact," I looked intently at Dr. Hugo's clever face, "I don't see the point or purpose of your sending Madam Wienerz to him. It isn't like you to go in for pointless malice." Dr. Hugo was silent. "Or were you more jealous of Dr. Mudie than you've let on?"

"I never had any interest in Mudie or jealousy of him," Dr. Hugo said. "He was a nuisance and a fool. It was Hans Wienerz who stood between me and my happiness."

"What happened — to Wienerz?" I asked slowly.

"Caleb laid a deep plot," said Dr. Hugo, "which he kept from me until it was over. Although you only have my word for that. If you are suspecting me as the villain of this story, it might well be that Caleb discussed his plot with me — even that I may have put the plot in his mind. He's no longer here to offer his version. You will therefore have to be content with mine.

"Caleb persuaded Madam Wienerz that he could prove that her jealousy was groundless, that he could convince her of that fact. He would call her husband to his office and question him, and Madam Wienerz could be hidden in a closet of his office, with the door ajar, and listen to her husband's answer.

"Three days later Caleb called on me late at night." Dr. Hugo smiled at my staring interest. "He had a newspaper in his hand — with a headline much like this one." Dr. Hugo tapped the newspaper in his lap. "It contained a story of the fatal shooting of Hans Wienerz by his demented wife, Stella Wienerz. The gunplay had taken place in the office of Dr. Caleb Mudie that afternoon."

"You weren't too surprised, I hope," I said.

"I am never surprised by anything," Dr. Hugo said. "I listened to

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our diabolic Caleb without batting an eye. He was very smug about his murder by proxy — and he recited his little plot in full.

"Hans Wienerz had come to his office and Caleb, acting as a scientist interested only in saving Madam Wienerz's sanity, had questioned him. Did he know that uncertainty was destroying his wife's health? There was only one cure for Madam's headaches — the truth. If he — Dr. Mudie — knew the truth he would know how to treat Madam — how to soothe her, what methods to pursue. And he promised the glowering and distracted Hans that the truth — whatever it was — would go no further than his office.

"Please," Dr. Hugo smiled at my staring, "it was Mudie who said these things, not I."

"He seems suddenly a very clever man," I said.

"Jealousy has that effect on people, sometimes," Dr. Hugo said. "It sharpens their wits."

"Wienerz told the truth?" I asked.

"Yes," Dr. Hugo said. "He said that Madam's suspicions were well founded — that, in fact, he was running off with Felicia as soon as her show closed — in two weeks.

"And at this point," Dr. Hugo sighed, "Madam Wienerz came out of the closet and fired five bullets into the body of her truth-telling husband. He died instantly. The widow was removed a few days later to an institution for the criminally insane."

"Dr. Mudie seems to have committed a perfect crime," I said, "with your slight aid."

"Yes, that was Caleb's attitude," said Dr. Hugo. "He was very amused at my dilemma. I could not inform against him. Not because — as you suggest — I had helped him polish off his rival, Hans (I should say our rival, I suppose), by sending the homicidal wife to him for treatment. But for the much simpler reason that he had only to deny what I said — and I would be held up to scorn as a publicity-seeking psychiatrist who was trying to betray a patient, to boot."

"And you couldn't tell Felicia the truth, either," I said, "without losing her forever."

"It is pleasant to be understood." Dr. Hugo smiled. "You are quite right — Felicia believes me a very clever man. She would very likely fancy I had arranged the murder of her fiddler and in her first grief over his death develop a hatred against me from which she might never recover. I decided to wait until Felicia's tears subsided — and the story would be less a shock to her. At which time, of course, it might not be necessary to tell her anything. For winning Felicia back from Dr. Mudie presented no problem to me. Hans had been the problem. And Hans was gone."

Dr. Hugo sighed.

"I waited too long, however," he said. "For when Caleb visited me again two weeks later, he had married Felicia that morning. You must believe me when I tell you that I had not anticipated this move.

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"The bridegroom was flushed and garrulous. He told me Felicia didn't know he had found out the truth about her and Hans. She had cried for a week after Hans's death and despite Caleb's public connection with the fiddler's name, she pretended she had never even heard it. She explained her grief by telling Caleb her brother had been killed in an accident.

"Felicia's duplicity didn't surprise me. Lies are the finery of the female mind. A woman dislikes being caught in the truth as much as she does being found without make-up on, her hair uncombed, and her stockings down.

"But Caleb was a bit of a revelation. I hadn't expected so much cunning or so much hatred in him of Felicia. All his long-standing loathing of women was now concentrated on Felicia — and his plot to break her down and utterly destroy her personality."

Dr. Hugo smiled.

"I shall make all this very clear on the witness stand," he said. "I shall tell the jury how Dr. Mudie enjoyed the situation, how he gloated over Felicia's feeling of guilt for her lover's death."

He paused, then resumed wryly:

"I pointed out to Caleb that that was why she had married him — as a species of atonement. She wanted to punish herself for having destroyed Hans by loving him. And what greater punishment could a woman inflict on herself than becoming Mrs. Mudie?

"Caleb laughed at my indignation. He said he was going to see to it that Mrs. Mudie's atonement was a thorough one. He was going to tell her that he knew all about her lies and deceptions. He was going to make her confess her love for the dead Hans. And he was going to prove to her that it was her own lying soul that had killed him. In short, our Caleb was going to unmask Felicia and put an end to her dual nature. He was going to make her spit out the truth of her abominable betrayal of himself and of the dead man. He was going to make her atone for all her sins — by bringing them into the open. When he got through with her, said Caleb, there would be left a different Felicia — a made-over Felicia who would never again dare to lie or to fool a man.

"I asked him when he intended to start this campaign of torture and Caleb answered me smugly that he was going to continue as her honeymooning dupe on the boat. They were leaving the next day. And, said he, when they had reached their hotel and were all unpacked, in Miami, he would then start his inquisition."

Dr. Hugo tapped the murder headline from Miami and added,

"Caleb's reform movement backfired rather quickly. Of course, I could have prevented all that by talking to Felicia — as I told you. And I intended to — the next morning. Knowing Felicia as I do, I could have made a good guess as to how she would react under torture. Very much as

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she did. But they left that night. Caleb had fooled me about the time of the boat departure."

"That surprises me a little," I said. "Caleb fooling you. It would have been the first thing I'd have thought of — that he wasn't going to let you talk to Felicia."

Dr. Hugo looked at me blandly.

"Perhaps I was too distressed," he said.

"What advice do you want from me?" I asked.

"I wanted to ask if you thought my marrying Felicia before her trial would lessen my effectiveness as her witness. But I've decided for myself while talking to you. It will be better if I wait."

Dr. Hugo poured drinks and sat, glass in hand, looking into the fireplace. His eyes were half-closed and he was waiting for a verdict, from me. For he had obviously put himself on trial before me and confessed to having murdered two men, so deftly and so cunningly that no punishment could ever be meted out to him by the law.

But had he really done these murders, I wondered. It could be that he was merely boasting of how subtle and clever a man he was and laying claim to two perfect crimes as proof of his vast superiority to the human race and all its institutions. Such a boast would be in keeping with the Hugo character. But so would the boast of murder. Dr. Hugo would want someone to know how brilliant he had been in disposing of his two rivals. His ego would demand the applause of someone fully aware of his cunning. There have been criminals who actually confessed to real crimes for no other reason than that.

I was weighing the matter when the doorbell rang. A telegram was delivered.

Dr. Hugo opened it slowly, studied it, and then handed it to me.

I read:

"Darling. Thanks. I need you. Hurry. All my love. Felicia."

Dr. Hugo smiled at me.

"I knew that would be her answer," he said. "To know the souls of others is the great sport of living. Would you care to come to the station with me? I am all packed. You see, I already have a reservation on the midnight train to Miami."

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WINNER OF A FOURTH PRIZE: FREDRIC BROWN

If you are a "constant reader" of EQMM, or even if you have missed an occasional issue, you will remember the work of Fredric Brown. His stories range all the way from tales of humorous homicide, once over lightly, to tales of terror which bring dark corners to life and make you reluctant to put out the light and go to sleep — that is, if you have any conviction you can *sleep. And then, in 1947, his* THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT *won the coveted "Edgar" awarded by the Mystery Writers of America for the best first novel of the year. Yes, Fredric Brown is going places in the mystery field, and those who predict that some day his name will be one to conjure with are backing a favorite, not a long shot.*

Mr. Brown's contribution to last year's contest is that uncommon type of detective story which combines straight sleuthing with science fiction — an adventure into time, into the year 1999. The basic idea for the story occurred to Fredric Brown while he was reading a brief history of the lie-detector in "The Talk of the Town" department of "The New Yorker." The history traced the modern lie-detector back to 260 B.C. — to the discovery by the Greek physician Erasistratus that a person's pulse tends to shoot up when he tries to conceal something mentally. Little was done to make use of the discovery — except through witch-doctor methods in the Middle Ages — until Cesare Lombroso succeeded in measuring the blood pressure and pulse rates of criminals while being questioned and found that both fluctuated when the criminals lied. The most recent step, according to "The New Yorker" article, is a device invented by the late Reverend Walter G. Summers, S.J., at Fordham; this instrument, called either the pathometer or the psychogalvanometer (not as much of a jaw-breaker as it looks!), records psychological and emotional changes by means of an electric current passing between a pair of silver electrodes, one placed against the palm, the other against the back of the hand.

Then, too, Fredric Brown learned that lie-detector tests have already been admitted in evidence by a few lower trial courts in this country.

All these new facts coalesced, and the basic conception of "Crisis, 1999" flashed into Mr. Brown's consciousness. He had been reading about the lie-detector's past history; suddenly it occurred to him: what of the lie-detector's future history? And that wondering, by the devious paths of detectival deliberation, burst into flower as a fully-integrated fantasy.

Hop a helicopter and hover over the corner of State and Randolph Streets as Bela Joad, the 'tec of tomorrow, buys a micronews on that fateful day, March 21, 1999 . . .

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CRISIS, 1999

by FREDRIC BROWN

THE little man with the sparse gray hair and the inconspicuous bright red suit stopped on the corner of State and Randolph to buy a micronews, a Chicago Sun-Tribune of March 21st, 1999. Nobody noticed him as he walked into the corner superdrug and took a vacant booth. He dropped a quarter into the coffee-slot and while the conveyor brought him his coffee, he glanced at the headlines on the tiny three-by-four-inch page. His eyes were unusually keen; he could read those headlines easily without artificial aid. But nothing on the first page or the second interested him; they concerned international matters, the third Venus rocket, and the latest depressing report of the ninth moon expedition. But on page three there were two stories concerning crime, and he took a tiny micrographer from his pocket and adjusted it to read the stories while he drank his coffee.

Bela Joad was the little man's name. His right name, that is; he'd gone by so many names in so many places that only a phenomenal memory could have kept track of them all, but he had a phenomenal memory. None of those names had ever appeared in print, nor had his face or voice ever been seen or heard on the ubiquitous video. Fewer than a score of people, all of them top officials in various police bureaus, knew that Bela Joad was the greatest detective in the world.

He was not an employee of any police department, drew no salary nor expense money, and collected no rewards. It may have been that he had private means and indulged in the detection of criminals as a hobby. It may equally have been that he preyed upon the underworld even as he fought it, that he made criminals support his campaign against them. Whichever was the case, he worked for no one; he worked against crime. When a major crime or a series of major crimes interested him, he would work on it, sometimes consulting beforehand with the chief of police of the city involved, sometimes working without the chief's knowledge until he would appear in the chief's office and present him with the evidence that would enable him to make an arrest and obtain a conviction.

He himself had never testified, or even appeared, in a courtroom. And while he knew every important underworld character in a dozen cities, no member of the underworld knew him, except fleetingly, under some transient identity which he seldom resumed.

Now, over his morning coffee, Bela Joad read through his micrographer the two stories in the Sun-Tribune

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which had interested him. One concerned a case that had been one of his few failures, the disappearance — possibly the kidnaping — of Dr. Ernst Chappel, professor of criminology at Columbia University. The headline read, NEW LEAD IN CHAPPEL CASE, but a careful reading of the story showed the detective that the lead was new only to the newspapers; he himself had followed it into a blind alley two years ago, just after Chappel had vanished. The other story revealed that one Paul (Gyp) Girard had yesterday been acquitted of the slaying of his rival for control of North Chicago gambling. Joad read that one carefully indeed. Just six hours before, seated in a beergarten in New Berlin, Western Germany, he had heard the news of that acquittal on the video, without details. He had immediately taken the first stratoplane to Chicago.

When he had finished with the micronews, he touched the button of his wrist model timeradio, which automatically attuned itself to the nearest timestation, and it said, just loudly enough for him to hear "Nine-oh-four." Chief Dyer Rand would be in his office, then.

Nobody noticed him as he left the superdrug. Nobody noticed him as he walked with the morning crowds along Randolph to the big, new Municipal Building at the corner of Clark. Chief Rand's secretary sent in his name — not his real one, but one Rand would recognize — without giving him a second glance.

Chief Rand shook hands across the desk and then pressed the intercom button that flashed a blue not-to-be-disturbed signal to his secretary. He leaned back in his chair and laced his fingers across the conservatively small (one inch) squares of his mauve and yellow shirt. He said, "You heard about Gyp Girard being acquitted?"

"That's why I'm here."

Rand pushed his lips out and pulled them in again. He said, "The evidence you sent me was perfectly sound, Joad. It should have stood up. But I wish you had brought it in yourself instead of sending it by the tube, or that there had been some way I could have got in touch with you. I could have told you we'd probably not get a conviction. Joad, something rather terrible has been happening. I've had a feeling you would be my only chance. If only there had been some way I could have got in touch with you —"

"Two years ago?"

Chief Rand looked startled. "Why did you say that?"

"Because it was two years ago that Dr. Chappel disappeared in New York."

"Oh," Rand said. "No, there's no connection. I thought maybe you knew something when you mentioned two years. It hasn't been quite that long, really, but it was close."

He got up from behind the strangely-shaped plastic desk and began to pace back and forth the length of the office.

He said, "Joad, in the last year —

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let's just consider that period, although it started nearer two years ago — out of every ten major crimes committed in Chicago, seven are unsolved. Technically unsolved, that is; in five out of those seven we know who's guilty but we can't prove it. We can't get a conviction.

"The underworld is beating us, Joad, worse than they have at any time since the Prohibition era of seventy-five years ago. If this keeps up, we're going back to days like that, and worse.

"For a twenty-year period now we've had convictions for eight out of ten major crimes. Even before twenty years ago — before the use of the lie-detector in court was legalized, we did better than we're doing now. 'Way back in the decade of 1970 to 1980, for instance, we did better than we're doing now by more than two to one; we got convictions for six out of every ten major crimes. This last year, it's been three out of ten.

"And I know the reason, but I don't know what to do about it. The reason is that the underworld is beating the lie-detector!"

Bela Joad nodded. But he said mildly, "A few have always managed to beat it. It's not perfect. Judges always instruct juries to remember that the lie-detector's findings have a high degree of probability but are not infallible, that they should be weighed as indicative but not final, that other evidence must support them. And there has always been the occasional individual who can tell a whopper with the detector on him, and not jiggle the graph needles at all."

"One in a thousand, yes. But, Joad, almost every underworld big-shot has been beating the lie-detector recently."

"I take it you mean the professional criminals, not the amateurs."

"Exactly. Only regular members of the underworld — professionals, the habitual criminals. If it weren't for that, I'd think — I don't know what I'd think. Maybe that our whole theory was wrong."

Bela Joad said, "Can't you quit using it in court in such cases? Convictions were obtained before its use was legalized. For that matter, before it was invented."

Dyer Rand sighed and dropped into his pneumatic chair again. "Sure, I'd like that if I could do it. I wish right now that the detector never *had* been invented or legalized. But don't forget that the law legalizing it gives *either* side the opportunity to use it in court. If a criminal knows he can beat it, he's going to demand its use even if we don't. And what chance have we got with a jury if the accused demands the detector and it backs up his plea of innocence?"

"Very slight, I'd say."

"Less than slight, Joad. This Gyp Girard business yesterday. I know he killed Pete Bailey. You know it. The evidence you sent me was, under ordinary circumstances, conclusive. And yet I knew we'd lose the case. I wouldn't have bothered bringing it to trial except for one thing."

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"And that one thing?"

"*To get you here*, Joad. There was no other way I could reach you, but I hoped that if you read of Girard's acquittal, after the evidence you'd given me, you'd come around to find out what had happened."

He got up and started to pace again. "Joad, I'm going mad. *How* is the underworld beating the machine? That's what I want you to find out, and it's the biggest job you've ever tackled. Take a year, take five years, but crack it, Joad.

"Look at the history of law enforcement. Always the law has been one jump ahead of the criminal in the field of science. Now the criminals — of Chicago, anyway — are one jump ahead of *us*. And if they stay that way, if we don't get the answer, we're headed for a new dark age, when it'll no longer be safe for a man or a woman to walk down the street. The very foundations of our society can crumble. We're up against something very evil and very powerful."

Bela Joad took a cigarette from the dispenser on the desk; it lighted automatically as he picked it up. It was a green cigarette and he exhaled green smoke through his nostrils before he asked, almost disinterestedly, "Any ideas, Dyer?"

"I've had two, but I think I've eliminated both of them. One is that the machines are being tampered with. The other is that the technicians are being tampered with. But I've had both men and machines checked from every possible angle and can't find a thing. On big cases I've taken special precautions. For example, the detector we used at the Girard trial; it was brand-new and I had it checked right in this office." He chuckled. "I put Captain Burke under it and asked him if he was being faithful to his wife. He said he was and it nearly broke the needle. I had it taken to the courtroom under special guard."

"And the technician who used it?"

"I used it myself. Took a course in it, evenings, for four months."

Bela Joad nodded. "So it isn't the machine and it isn't the operator. That's eliminated, and I can start from there."

"How long will it take you, Joad?"

The little man in the red suit shrugged. "I haven't any idea."

"Is there any help I can give you? Anything you want to start on?"

"Just one thing, Dyer. I want a list of the criminals who have beaten the detector and a dossier on each. Just the ones you're morally sure actually committed the crimes you questioned them about. If there's any reasonable doubt, leave them off the list. How long will it take you to get it ready?"

"It's ready now; I had it made up on the chance that you'd come here. And it's a long report, so I had it microed down for you." He handed Bela Joad a small envelope.

Joad said, "Thank you. I won't contact you till I have something or until I want your cooperation. I think first I'm going to stage a murder, and then have you question the murderer."

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Dyer Rand's eyes went wide. "Whom are you going to have murdered?"

Bela Joad smiled. "Me," he said.

He took the envelope Rand had given him back to his hotel and spent several hours studying the microfilms through his pocket micrographer memorizing their contents thoroughly. Then he burned both films and envelope.

After that Bela Joad paid his hotel bill and disappeared, but a little man who resembled Bela Joad only slightly rented a cheap room under the name of Martin Blue. The room was on Lake Shore Drive, which was then the heart of Chicago's underworld.

The underworld of Chicago had changed less, in fifty years, than one would think. Human vices do not change, or at least they change but slowly. True, certain crimes had diminished greatly but on the other hand, gambling had increased. Greater social security than any country had hitherto known was, perhaps, a factor. One no longer needed to save for old age as, in days gone by, a few people did.

Gambling was a lush field for the crooks and they cultivated the field well. Improved technology had increased the number of ways of gambling and it had increased the efficiency of ways of making gambling crooked. Crooked gambling was big business and underworld wars and killings occurred over territorial rights, just as they had occurred over such rights in the far back days of Prohibition when alcohol was king. There was still alcohol, but it was of lesser importance now. People were learning to drink more moderately. And drugs were passé, although there was still some traffic in them.

Robberies and burglaries still occurred, although not quite as frequently as they had fifty years before.

Murder was slightly more frequent. Sociologists and criminologists differed as to the reason for the increase of crime in this category.

The weapons of the underworld had, of course, improved, but they did not include atomics. All atomic and subatomic weapons were strictly controlled by the military and were never used by either the police or by criminals. They were too dangerous; the death penalty was mandatory for anyone found in possession of an atomic weapon. But the pistols and guns of the underworld of 1999 were quite efficient. They were much smaller and more compact, and they were silent. Both guns and cartridges were made of superhard magnesium and were very light. The commonest weapon was the .19 calibre pistol — as deadly as the .45 of an earlier era because the tiny projectiles were explosive. And even a small pocket-pistol held from fifty to sixty rounds.

But back to Martin Blue, whose entrance into the underworld coincided with the disappearance of Bela Joad from the latter's hotel.

Martin Blue, as it turned out, was not a very nice man. He had no visible means of support other than

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gambling and he seemed to lose, in small amounts, almost more often than he won. He almost got in trouble on a bad check he gave to cover his losses in one game, but he managed to avoid being liquidated by making the check good. His only reading seemed to be the Racing Microform, and he drank too much, mostly in a tavern (with clandestine gambling at the back) which formerly had been operated by Gyp Girard. He got beaten up there once because he defended Gyp against a crack made by the current proprietor to the effect that Gyp had lost his guts and turned honest.

For a while fortune turned against Martin Blue and he went so broke that he had to take a job as a waiter in the outside room of a Michigan Boulevard joint called Sloppy Joe's, possibly because Joe Zatelli, who ran it, was the nattiest dresser in Chicago — and in the *fin de siècle* era when leopard-skin suits (synthetic but finer and more expensive than real leopard skin) were a dime a dozen and plain pastel-silk underwear was dated.

Then a funny thing happened to Martin Blue. Joe Zatelli killed him. Caught him, after hours, rifling the till, and just as Martin Blue turned around, Zatelli shot him. Three times for good measure. And then Zatelli, who never trusted accomplices, got the body into his car and deposited it in an alley back of a teletheater.

The body of Martin Blue got up and went to see Chief Dyer Rand and told Rand what he wanted done.

"You took a hell of a chance," Rand said.

"Not too much of a chance," Blue said. "I'd put blanks in his gun and I was pretty sure he'd use that. He won't find out, incidentally, that the rest of the bullets in it are blanks unless he tries to kill somebody else with it; they don't *look* like blanks. And I had a pretty special vest on under my suit. Rigid backing and padded on top to feel like flesh, but of course he couldn't feel a heartbeat through it. And it was gimmicked to make a noise like explosive cartridges hitting — when the duds punctured the compartments."

"But if he'd switched guns or bullets?"

"Oh, the vest was bulletproof for anything short of atomics. The danger was in his thinking of any fancy way of disposing of the body. If he had, I could have taken care of myself, of course, but it would have spoiled the plan and cost me three months' build-up. But I'd studied his style and I was pretty sure what he'd do. Now here's what I want you to do, Dyer —"

The newspapers and videocasts the next morning carried the story of the finding of a body of an unidentified man in a certain alley. By afternoon they reported that it had been identified as the body of Martin Blue, a small-time crook who had lived on Lake Shore Drive, in the heart of the Tenderloin. And by evening a rumor had gone out through the underworld to the effect that the police suspected Joe Zatelli, for whom Blue had

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worked, and might pick him up for questioning.

And plainclothesmen watched Zatelli's place, front and back, to see where he'd go if he went out. Watching the front was a small man about the build of Bela Joad or Martin Blue. Unfortunately, Zatelli happened to leave by the back and he succeeded in shaking off the detectives on his trail.

They picked him up the next morning, though, and took him to headquarters. They put the lie-detector on him and asked him about Martin Blue. He admitted Blue had worked for him but said he'd last seen Blue when the latter had left his place after work the night of the murder. The lie-detector said he wasn't lying.

Then they pulled a tough one on him. Martin Blue walked into the room where Zatelli was being questioned. And the trick fizzled. The gauges of the detector didn't jump a fraction of a millimeter and Zatelli looked at Blue and then at his interrogators with complete indignation. "What's the idea?" he demanded. "The guy ain't even dead, and you're asking me if I bumped him off?"

They asked Zatelli, while they had him there, about some other crimes he might have committed, but obviously — according to his answers and the lie-detector — he hadn't done any of them. They let him go.

Of course, that was the end of Martin Blue. After showing before Zatelli at headquarters, he might as well have been dead in an alley for all the good he was going to do.

Bela Joad told Chief Rand, "Well anyway, now we *know*."

"What do we know?"

"We know for sure the detector is being beaten. You might conceivably have been making a series of wrong arrests before. Even the evidence I gave you against Girard might have been misleading. But we *know* Zatelli beat the machine. Only I wish Zatelli had come out the front way so I could have tailed him; we might have the whole thing now instead of part of it."

"You're going back? Going to do it all over again?"

"Not the same way. This time I've got to be on the other end of a murder, and I'll need your help on that."

"Of course. But won't you tell me what's on your mind?"

"I'm afraid I can't, Dyer. I've got a hunch within a hunch. In fact, I've had it ever since I started on this business. But will you do one other thing for me?"

"Sure. What?"

"Have one of your men keep track of Zatelli, of everything he does from now on. Put another one on Gyp Girard. In fact, take as many men as you can spare and put one on each of the men you're fairly sure has beaten the detector within the last year or two. And always from a distance; don't let the boys know they're being checked on. Will you?"

"I don't know what you're after, but I'll do it. Won't you tell me *anything?* Joad, this is important. Don't forget it's not just *a* case; it's some-

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thing that can lead to the breakdown of law enforcement."

Bela Joad smiled. "Not quite that bad, Dyer. Law enforcement as it applies to the underworld, yes. But you're getting your usual percentage of convictions on nonprofessional crimes."

Dyer Rand looked puzzled. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Maybe everything. It's why I can't tell you anything yet. But don't worry." Joad reached across the desk and patted the chief's shoulder, looking — although he didn't know it — like a fox terrier giving his paw to an airedale. "Don't worry, Dyer. I'll promise to bring you the answer. Maybe I won't be able to let you keep it."

"Do you really know what you're looking for?"

"Yes. I'm looking for a criminologist who disappeared well over two years ago. Dr. Ernst Chappel."

"You think —?"

"Yes, I think. That's why I'm looking for Dr. Chappel."

But that was all Dyer could get out of him. Bela Joad left Dyer Rand's office and returned to the underworld.

And in the underworld of Chicago a new star arose. Perhaps one should call him a *nova* rather than merely a star, so rapidly did he become famous — or notorious. Physically, he was rather a small man, no larger than Bela Joad or Martin Blue, but he wasn't a mild little man like Joad or a weak jackal like Blue. He had what it took, and he parlayed what he had. He ran a small night club, but that was just a front. Behind that front things happened, things that the police couldn't pin on him, and — for that matter — didn't seem to know about, although the underworld knew.

His name was Willie Ecks, and nobody in the underworld had ever made friends and enemies faster. He had plenty of each; the former were powerful and the latter were dangerous. In other words, they were both the same type of people.

His brief career was truly — if I may scramble my star-nova metaphor but keep it celestial — a meteoric matter. And for once that hackneyed and inaccurate metaphor is used correctly. Meteors do not rise — as anybody who has ever studied meteorology, which has no connection with meteors, knows. Meteors fall, with a dull thud. And that is what happened to Willie Ecks, when he got high enough.

Three days before, Willie Ecks's worst enemy had vanished. Two of his henchmen spread the rumor that it was because the cops had come and taken him away, but that was obviously malarkey designed to cover the fact that they intended to avenge him. That became obvious when, the very next morning, the news broke that the gangster's body had been found, neatly weighted, in the Blue Lagoon at Washington Park.

And by dusk of that very day rumor had gone from bistro to bistro of the underworld that the police had

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pretty good proof who had killed the deceased — and with a forbidden atomic at that — and that they planned to arrest Willie Ecks and question him. Things like that get around even when it's not intended that they should.

And it was on the second day of Willie Ecks's hiding-out in a cheap little hotel on North Clark Street, an old-fashioned hotel with elevators and windows, his whereabouts known only to a trusted few, that one of those trusted few gave a certain knock on his door and was admitted.

The trusted one's name was Mike Leary and he'd been a close friend of Willie's and a close enemy of the gentleman who, according to the papers, had been found in the Blue Lagoon.

He said, "Looks like you're in a jam, Willie."

"——, yes," said Willie Ecks. He hadn't used facial depilatory for two days; his face was blue with beard and bluer with fear.

Mike said, "There's a way out, Willie. It'll cost you ten grand. Can you raise it?"

"I've got it. What's the way out?"

"There's a guy. I know how to get in touch with him; I ain't used him myself, but I would if I got in a jam like yours. He can fix you up, Willie."

"How?"

"He can show you how to beat the lie-detector. I can have him come around to see you and fix you up. Then you let the cops pick you up and question you, see? They'll drop the charge — or if they bring it to trial, they can't make it stick."

"What if they ask me about — well, never mind what — other things I may have done?"

"He'll take care of that, too. For five grand he'll fix you so you can go under that detector clean as — as clean as hell."

"You said ten grand."

Mike Leary grinned. "I got to live too, don't I, Willie? And you said you got ten grand, so it ought to be worth that much to you, huh?"

Willie Ecks argued, but in vain. He had to give Mike Leary five thousand-dollar bills. Not that it really mattered, because those were pretty special thousand-dollar bills. The green ink on them would turn purple within a few days. Even in 1999 you couldn't spend a purple thousand-dollar bill, so when it happened Mike Leary would probably turn purple too, but by that time it would be too late for him to do anything about it.

It was late that evening when there was a knock on Willie Ecks's hotel room door. He pressed the button that made the main panel of the door transparent from his side.

He studied the nondescript-looking man outside the door very carefully. He didn't pay any attention to facial contours or to the shabby yellow suit the man wore. He studied the eyes somewhat, but mostly he studied the shape and conformation of the ears and compared them mentally with the ears of photographs he had once studied exhaustively.

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And then Willie Ecks put his gun back into his pocket and opened the door. He said, "Come in."

The man in the yellow suit entered the room and Willie Ecks shut the door very carefully and locked it.

He said, "I'm proud to meet you, Dr. Chappel."

He sounded as though he meant it, and he did mean it.

It was four o'clock in the morning when Bela Joad stood outside the door of Dyer Rand's apartment. He had to wait, there in the dimly luminous hallway, for as long as it took the chief to get out of bed and reach the door, then activate the one-way-transparent panel to examine his visitor.

Then the magnetic lock sighed gently and the door opened. Rand's eyes were bleary and his hair was tousled. His feet were thrust into red plastic slippers and he wore neonylon sleeping pajamas that looked as though they had been slept in.

He stepped aside to let Bela Joad in, and Joad walked to the center of the room and stood looking about curiously. It was the first time he'd ever been in Rand's private quarters. The apartment was like that of any other well-to-do bachelor of the day. The furniture was unobtrusive and functional, each wall a different pastel shade, faintly fluorescent and emitting gentle radiant heat and the faint but constant caress of ultraviolet that kept people who could afford such apartments healthily tanned. The rug was in alternate one-foot squares of cream and gray, the squares separate and movable so that wear would be equalized. And the ceiling, of course, was the customary one-piece mirror that gave an illusion of height and spaciousness.

Rand said, "Good news, Joad?"

"Yes. But this is an unofficial interview, Dyer. What I'm going to tell you is confidential, between us."

"What do you mean?"

Joad looked at him. He said, "You still look sleepy, Dyer. Let's have coffee. It'll wake you up, and I can use some myself."

"Fine," Dyer said. He went into the kitchenette and pressed the button that would heat the coils of the coffee-tap. "Want it laced?" he called back.

"Of course."

Within a minute he came back with two cups of steaming *café royale*. With obvious impatience he waited until they were seated comfortably and each had taken his first sip of the fragrant beverage before he asked, "Well, Joad?"

"When I say it's unofficial, Dyer, I *mean* it. I can give you the full answer, but only with the understanding that you'll forget it as soon as I tell you, that you'll never tell another person, and that you won't act upon it."

Dyer Rand stared at his guest in amazement. He said, "I can't promise that! I'm chief of police, Joad. I have my duty to my job and to the people of Chicago."

"That's why I came here, to your

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apartment, instead of to your office. You're not working now, Dyer; you're on your own time."

"But —"

"Do you promise?"

"Of course not."

Bela Joad sighed. "Then I'm sorry for waking you, Dyer." He put down his cup and started to rise.

"Wait! You can't do that. You can't just walk out on me!"

"Can't I?"

"All right, all right, I'll promise. You must have some good reason. Have you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll take your word for it."

Bela Joad smiled. "Good," he said. "Then I'll be able to report to you on my last case. For this is my last case, Dyer. I'm going into a new kind of work."

Rand looked at him incredulously. "What?"

"I'm going to teach crooks how to beat the lie-detector."

Chief Dyer Rand put down his cup slowly and stood up. He took a step toward the little man, about half his weight, who sat at ease on the armless, overstuffed chair.

Bela Joad still smiled. He said, "Don't try it, Dyer. For two reasons. First, you couldn't hurt me and I wouldn't want to hurt you and I might have to. Second, it's all right; it's on the up and up. Sit down."

Dyer Rand sat down.

Bela Joad said, "When you said this thing was big, you didn't know how big. And it's going to be bigger; Chicago is just the starting point. And thanks, by the way, for those reports I asked you for. They are just what I expected they'd be."

"The reports? But they're still in my desk at headquarters."

"They were. I've read them and destroyed them. Your copies, too. Forget about them. And don't pay too much attention to your current statistics. I've read them, too."

Rand frowned. "And why should I forget them?"

"Because they confirm what Ernie Chappel told me this evening. Do you know, Dyer, that your *number* of major crimes has gone down in the past year by an even bigger percentage than the percentage by which your convictions for major crimes has gone down?"

"I noticed that. You mean, there's a connection?"

"Definitely. Most crimes — a very high percentage of them — are committed by professional criminals, repeaters. And Dyer, it goes even farther than that. Out of several thousand major crimes a year, ninety percent of them are committed by *a few hundred professional criminals.* And do you know that the number of professional criminals in Chicago has been reduced by almost a third in the last two years? It *has*. And that's why your number of major crimes has decreased."

Bela Joad took another sip of his coffee and then leaned forward. "Gyp Girard, according to your report, is now running a vitadrink stand on the

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West Side; he hasn't committed a crime in almost a year — since he beat your lie-detector." He touched another finger. "Joe Zatelli, who used to be the roughest boy on the Near North Side, is now running his restaurant straight. Carey Hutch. Wild Bill Wheeler — Why should I list them all? You've got the list, and it's not complete because there are plenty of names you haven't got on it, people who went to Ernie Chappel so he could show them how to beat the detector, and then didn't get arrested after all. And nine out of ten of them — and that's conservative, Dyer — *haven't committed a crime since!*"

Dyer Rand said, "Go on. I'm listening."

"My original investigation of the Chappel case showed me that he'd disappeared voluntarily. And I knew he was a good man, and a great one. I knew he was mentally sound because he was a psychiatrist as well as a criminologist. A psychiatrist's *got* to be sound. So I knew he'd disappeared for some good reason.

"And when, about nine months ago, I heard your side of what had been happening in Chicago, I began to suspect that Chappel had come here to do his work. Are you beginning to get the picture?"

"Faintly."

"Well, don't faint yet. Not until you figure how an expert psychiatrist can help crooks beat the detector. Or have you?"

"Well —"

"That's it. The most elementary form of hypnotic treatment, something any qualified psychiatrist could do fifty years ago. Chappel's clients — of course they don't know who or what he is; he's a mysterious underworld figure who helps them beat the rap — pay him well and tell him what crimes they may be questioned about by the police if they're picked up. He tells them to include every crime they've ever committed and any racket they've ever been in, so the police won't catch them up on any old counts. Then he —"

"Wait a minute," Rand interrupted. "How does he get them to trust him that far?"

Joad gestured impatiently. "Simple. They aren't confessing a single crime, even to him. He just wants a list that *includes* everything they've done. They can add some ringers and he doesn't know which is which. So it doesn't matter.

"Then he puts them under light waking-hypnosis and tells them they are not criminals and never have been and they have never done any of the things on the list he reads back to them. That's all there is to it.

"So when you put them under the detector and ask them if they've done this or that, they say they haven't and they *believe* it. That's why your detector gauges don't register. That's why Joe Zatelli didn't jump when he saw Martin Blue walk in. He didn't know Blue was dead — except that he'd read it in the papers."

Rand leaned forward. "Where is Ernst Chappel?"

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"You don't want him, Dyer."

"Don't *want* him? He's the most dangerous man alive today!"

"To whom?"

"To *whom?* Are you crazy?"

"I'm not crazy. He's the most dangerous man alive today — to the underworld. Look, Dyer, any time a criminal gets jittery about a possible pinch, he sends for Ernie or goes to Ernie. And Ernie washes him whiter than snow and in the process tells him *he's not a criminal.*

"And so, at least nine times out of ten, he quits being a criminal. Within ten or twenty years Chicago isn't going to *have* an underworld. There won't be any organized crimes by professional criminals. You'll always have the amateur with you, but he's a comparatively minor detail. How about some more *café royale?*"

Dyer Rand walked to the kitchenette and got it. He was wide awake by now, but he walked like a man in a dream.

When he came back, Joad said, "And now that I'm in with Ernie on it, Dyer, we'll stretch it to every city in the world big enough to have an underworld worth mentioning. We can train picked recruits; I've got my eye on two of your men and may take them away from you soon. But I'll have to check them first. We're going to pick our apostles — about a dozen of them — very carefully. They'll be the right men for the job."

"But, Joad, look at all the crimes that are going to go unpunished!" Rand protested.

Bela Joad drank the rest of his coffee and stood up. He said, "And which is more important — to punish criminals or to end crime? And, if you want to look at it moralistically, *should* a man be punished for a crime when he doesn't even remember committing it, when he is no longer a criminal?"

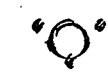
Dyer Rand sighed. "You win, I guess. I'll keep my promise. I suppose — I'll never see you again?"

"Probably not, Dyer. And I'll anticipate what you're going to say next. Yes, I'll have a farewell drink with you. A straight one, without the coffee."

Dyer Rand brought the glasses. He said, "Shall we drink to Ernie Chappel?"

Bela Joad smiled. He said, "Let's include him in the toast, Dyer. But let's drink to all men who work to put themselves out of work. Doctors work toward the day when the race will be so healthy it won't need doctors; lawyers work toward the day when litigation will no longer be necessary. And policemen, detectives, and criminologists work toward the day when they will no longer be needed because there will be no more crime."

Dyer Rand nodded very soberly and lifted his glass. They drank.



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Today Katherine Mansfield has a high-literary reputation, but throughout her all-too-short lifetime she was almost constantly pursued by ill-luck and ill-success. Her appearances in print constitute a brief roster of British "little magazines" — "The New Age," "Rhythm," "The Blue Review," "The Signature," and "Art and Letters," to mention only a few whose names, even now, suggest the flaming and rebellious spirit of those writers who make no compromise with so-called "popular" taste. Katherine Mansfield was only thirty-four when she died, and her all-too-short life was one of almost incessant ill-health — indeed, she and her husband, John Middleton Murry, spent most of the last ten years of her life traveling from place to place seeking a climate in which Katherine Mansfield could find the very act of living bearable.

Perhaps in some deep and subtle way all this accounts for the personalized quality of her work — the delicacy of her perception, the vivid awareness of her mind. Many of her stories seem trivial at first reading, both in tone and treatment; actually these apparently slight studies possess an almost leashed power, their significance emerging from what is implicit in them rather than from what is explicit. For example, here is the story of a kidnaping, as seen through the eyes of a child. Surely it is the oddest kidnaping ever recorded — "something perfectly different." You will almost resent the coming of the "little blue men" . . .

HOW PEARL BUTTON WAS KIDNAPED

by KATHERINE MANSFIELD

PEARL BUTTON swung on the little gate in front of the House of Boxes. It was the early afternoon of a sunshiny day with little winds playing hide-and-seek in it. They blew Pearl Button's pinafore frill into her mouth, and they blew the street dust all over the House of Boxes. Pearl watched it — like a cloud — like when mother peppered her fish and the top of the pepper-pot came off. She swung on the little gate, all alone, and she sang a small song. Two big women came walking down the street. One was dressed in red and the other was dressed in yellow and green. They had pink handkerchiefs over their heads, and both of them carried a big flax basket of ferns. They had no shoes and stockings on, and they came walking along, slowly, because they were so fat, and talking to each other and always smiling. Pearl stopped swinging, and when they saw her they stopped walking. They looked and looked at her and then they talked to

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each other, waving their arms and clapping their hands together. Pearl began to laugh.

The two women came up to her, keeping close to the hedge and looking in a frightened way towards the House of Boxes.

"Hallo, little girl!" said one.

Pearl said, "Hallo!"

"You all alone by yourself?"

Pearl nodded.

"Where's your mother?"

"In the kitchen, ironing-because-it's-Tuesday."

The women smiled at her and Pearl smiled back. "Oh," she said, "haven't you got very white teeth indeed! Do it again."

The dark women laughed, and again they talked to each other with funny words and wavings of the hands. "What's your name?" they asked her.

"Pearl Button."

"You coming with us, Pearl Button? We got beautiful things to show you," whispered one of the women. So Pearl got down from the gate and she slipped out into the road. And she walked between the two dark women down the windy road, taking little running steps to keep up, and wondering what they had in their House of Boxes.

They walked a long way. "You tired?" asked one of the women, bending down to Pearl. Pearl shook her head. They walked much farther. "You not tired?" asked the other woman. And Pearl shook her head again, but tears shook from her eyes at the same time and her lips trembled. One of the women gave over her flax basket of ferns and caught Pearl Button up in her arms, and walked with Pearl Button's head against her shoulder and her dusty little legs dangling. She was softer than a bed and she had a nice smell — a smell that made you bury your head and breathe and breathe it. . . .

They set Pearl Button down in a log room full of other people the same color as they were — and all these people came close to her and looked at her, nodding and laughing and throwing up their eyes. The woman who had carried Pearl took off her hair ribbon and shook her curls loose. There was a cry from the other women, and they crowded close and some of them ran a finger through Pearl's yellow curls, very gently, and one of them, a young one, lifted all Pearl's hair and kissed the back of her little white neck. Pearl felt shy but happy at the same time. There were some men on the floor, smoking, with rugs and feather mats round their shoulders. One of them made a funny face at her and he pulled a great big peach out of his pocket and set it on the floor, and flicked it with his finger as though it were a marble. It rolled right over to her. Pearl picked it up. "Please can I eat it?" she asked. At that they all laughed and clapped their hands, and the man with the funny face made another at her and pulled a pear out of his pocket and sent it bobbling over the floor. Pearl laughed. The women sat on the floor and Pearl sat down too. The floor was

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very dusty. She carefully pulled up her pinafore and dress and sat on her petticoat as she had been taught to sit in dusty places, and she ate the fruit, the juice running all down her front.

"Oh!" she said in a very frightened voice to one of the women, "I've spilt all the juice!"

"That doesn't matter at all," said the woman, patting her cheek. A man came into the room with a long whip in his hand. He shouted something. They all got up, shouting, laughing, wrapping themselves up in rugs and blankets and feather mats. Pearl was carried again, this time into a great cart, and she sat on the lap of one of her women with the driver beside her. It was a green cart with a red pony and a black pony. It went very fast out of the town. The driver stood up and waved the whip round his head. Pearl peered over the shoulder of her woman. Other carts were behind like a procession. She waved at them. Then the country came. First fields of short grass with sheep on them and little bushes of white flowers and pink briar rose baskets — then big trees on both sides of the road — and nothing to be seen except big trees. Pearl tried to look through them but it was quite dark. Birds were singing. She nestled closer in the big lap. The woman was warm as a cat, and she moved up and down when she breathed, just like purring. Pearl played with a green ornament round her neck, and the woman took the little hand and kissed each of her fingers and then turned it over and kissed the dimples. Pearl had never been happy like this before. On the top of a big hill they stopped. The driving man turned to Pearl and said, "Look, look!" and pointed with his whip.

And down at the bottom of the hill was something perfectly different — a great big piece of blue water was creeping over the land. She screamed and clutched at the big woman, "What is it, what is it?"

"Why," said the woman, "it's the sea."

"Will it hurt us — is it coming?"

"Ai-e, no, it doesn't come to us. It's very beautiful. You look again."

Pearl looked. "You're sure it can't come," she said.

"Ai-e, no. It stays in its place," said the big woman. Waves with white tops came leaping over the blue. Pearl watched them break on a long piece of land covered with garden-path shells. They drove round a corner.

There were some little houses down close to the sea, with wood fences round them and gardens inside. They comforted her. Pink and red and blue washing hung over the fences, and as they came near more people came out, and five yellow dogs with long thin tails. All the people were fat and laughing, with little naked babies holding on to them or rolling about in the gardens like puppies. Pearl was lifted down and taken into a tiny house with only one room and a verandah. There was a girl there with two pieces of black hair down to her feet. She was setting the dinner on the floor. "It *is* a funny place," said

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Pearl, watching the pretty girl while the woman unbuttoned her little drawers for her. She was very hungry. She ate meat and vegetables and fruit and the woman gave her milk out of a green cup. And it was quite silent except for the sea outside and the laughs of the two women watching her. "Haven't you got any Houses of Boxes?" she said. "Don't you all live in a row? Don't the men go to offices? Aren't there any nasty things?"

They took off her shoes and stockings, her pinafore and dress. She walked about in her petticoat and then she walked outside with the grass pushing between her toes. The two women came out with different sorts of baskets. They took her hands. Over a little paddock, through a fence, and then on warm sand with brown grass in it they went down to the sea. Pearl held back when the sand grew wet, but the women coaxed, "Nothing to hurt, very beautiful. You come." They dug in the sand and found some shells which they threw into the baskets. The sand was wet as mud pies. Pearl forgot her fright and began digging too. She got hot and wet, and suddenly over her feet broke a little line of foam. "Oo, oo!" she shrieked, dabbling with her feet, "Lovely, lovely!" She paddled in the shallow water. It was warm. She made a cup of her hands and caught some of it. But it stopped being blue in her hands. She was so excited that she rushed over to her woman and flung her little thin arms round the woman's neck, hugging her, kissing. . . .

Suddenly the girl gave a frightful scream. The woman raised herself and Pearl slipped down on the sand and looked towards the land. Little men in blue coats — little blue men came running, running towards her with shouts and whistlings — a crowd of little blue men to carry her back to the House of Boxes.

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these spine-tingling mystery thrillers are now on sale at your newsstand:

A MERCURY MYSTERY — "I Want To Go Home," by Richard and Frances Lockridge. Abridged edition. "Engaging characters, racing action, steadily simmering suspense . . . and customarily good writing," says *The Saturday Review of Literature.*

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A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY — "The Continental Op," by Dashiell Hammett, ". . . without question one of the great writers of mystery fiction."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Harl Cook's "Riding the Ghost" is one of the eleven "first stories" which won special awards in last year's contest. It introduces a specialist detective who is quite a character — but so is his girl friend and his mother and, not to be snobbish about it, most of the others in this wild-and-woolly yarn. The hero is a taxi-cab driver named Aristides Papadracopoulos, but don't let the name fool you: he is an ex-wrestler who calls himself Art Drake — a strong, slangy, sexy sleuth who can boast even more brains than brawn, and he's a 215-pound muscle-man. Art is known in the groan-and-grunt racket as the Greek Dragon, the Scholarly Strangler; he becomes a cab driver when one of his ring opponents dies, although the medical verdict is heart failure. Then there is Honeybunch, otherwise Miss Ellis, who sings and dances at "The Monkey's Uncle" — but meet her for yourself. "Riding the Ghost" dishes out plenty of action, with a typical thriller finish, but you have the conviction deep down that the author knows his hacking from first-hand experience, not from research. And we have a hunch it's the kind of story Craig Rice will like — let us know, will you, Craig?

Harl Cook is in his late thirties. He graduated from Trinity and took additional courses at the University of Athens. His father was George Cram Cook, American novelist, poet, and playwright, who with Susan Glaspell (Harl Cook's stepmother) founded the Provincetown Players "in an old fish-house which Mrs. Wilbur Daniel Steele had taken for a studio, at the end of Mary Heaton Vorse's wharf." Harl Cook's sister Nilla is a former disciple of Ghandi; she is now living in Iran where she is said to be running the State Theatre. "Riding the Ghost" is Harl Cook's first published story, after a varied career as a publisher's reader, commercial fisherman, and — yes, driving a taxi in New York City.

RIDING THE GHOST

by HARL COOK

IF ANYBODY had told me a couple of months earlier that I'd be walking up Webster Avenue through a blizzard at four thirty in the morning after pushing a load around all night, I would have thought he was nuts. Also, I wouldn't have known what he was talking about. But that's just what I was doing, and I wasn't feeling too sorry for myself about it either. All through the evening and night people had almost fought each other

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to get out of the weather into my cab, and I had clicked up thirty-two dollars and change on the meter in forty-four trips. Tips had been phenomenal — one five-dollar bill from three sports-minded priests on a two-eighty job from the Garden to Brooklyn, and the rest of the change of a dollar on almost all the small calls. I had better than twenty-nine dollars for myself — more than I'd made in a night's work since I had quit wrestling. So I hadn't had to "ride the ghost" at all on my first night's work. "Riding the ghost" consists of throwing the flag down when there's nobody in the cab, and then paying the company what the meter reads out of your tips — a dirty form of kick-back necessary because most cab companies expect at least twenty dollars a night on the meter whether there's any business on the streets or not. But best of all, I had managed to skid the load back into the garage under its own power, instead of leaving it stuck in a snowdrift in Queens or Yonkers or Greenpoint or some other equally unlikely hellhole. Half the loads hadn't come back that morning, and the dispatchers and bosses didn't like it that way. From a new man they wouldn't take it. So, as I walked up Webster toward the subway, I was congratulating myself on still having a job.

I was congratulating myself, but not with what could be called any wild form of enthusiasm, because I was also considering what sort of view Honeybunch was going to take about my becoming a hackie. And dim, I knew, would be the word for her view. Very, very dim.

A couple of blocks south of Tremont there was a glare of headlights in the snow from behind me. If it had been a cab just coming out for the day shift I would have grabbed it and said to hell with the subway. But I knew it wasn't a cab because regulation number one hundred and something out of innumerable ones the Hack Bureau has dreamed up to plague the hackies, said no headlights. Except for two dark semicircles on the windshield where the wipers click-clacked so insistently, the whole car was white with clinging snow — roof, fenders, windows, and even wheels. Just before it came abreast of me I heard a clunk of the brake being applied and knew that it had been applied too hard and that there was going to be a skid. I jumped through a drift, getting even more snow in my low shoes, into a doorway. But if I had been thinking straight I would have avoided the effort. For the Sanitation Department's scraper had already worked the avenue and pushed a protective pile of snow three to four feet high into the gutter and onto the sidewalk. So the skidding car stayed on the street. It whanged its rear-right fender into the pile in front of me, whirled around in the other direction, and came to a stop with its front bumper buried in the pile on the other side of the street.

As the driver opened the door and

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got out to see what the score was, I noticed a motionless figure slumped half on the front seat and half on the floor, carelessly covered with an overcoat. It didn't look good.

When I got over to him I saw that the young man was scared. Now some people *do* get scared over a skid like that — people who've had nasty skids before. But this fellow somehow didn't seem to be the type. Yet he was scared, and scared plenty.

"If you'll ease it in reverse while we push, she'll come right out," I volunteered.

"We?" the man asked.

I pointed toward the front seat.

"Oh, him," the man said, trying to grin. "He's out cold. Too much party."

I cleared a spot on the door window and looked in. The guy looked dead to me, but I wasn't going to argue the point. "Okay," I said, "you ease it in reverse, and I'll try to shove it alone."

As I went around the back of the car I brushed the snow off the rear license-plate. Pennsylvania TF 458.

I braced myself against the snowbank and pushed on the front bumper with my feet. The driver gave it too much gas too fast, and the wheels spun, but it came right out anyway.

The driver got out and quickly shut the door. "The reason I was trying to stop in the first place," he said, "was to ask you directions. I always get lost in the Bronx. I'm trying to get to Eighty-sixth and Lexington."

I didn't think he wanted to get to Eighty-sixth and Lexington any more than I did but I told him how to go there, and he drove off trying to be more careful about his clutch. It was twenty minutes to five.

It was almost five when the desk officer at the police station told me to report upstairs in the detectives' room.

Maybe Detective Martin didn't like his work, or maybe my arrival had broken up a pinochle game with the other dicks. But, whatever the reason, he didn't seem very impressed by my story. "What makes you think he was dead?" he asked.

"Death has a certain look about it. Even in photographs you can usually tell the difference between a real corpse and a phony."

"Would you be willing to swear he was dead?"

"No. But don't you think it might be a good idea to try to find out?"

The detective stared at me hard. I thought he was going to make some crack about knowing how to run his own business, but instead he said, "Haven't I seen you some place? Aren't you in the movies or something? What's your name?"

"No," I said. "I'm a hack driver. Aristides Papadracopoulos. One eighty-eight Horatio Street."

"Cripes!" said the cop, writing down the address. "But even with a monicker like that you don't look or talk like a hackie to me. Let's see your picture and badge."

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I fished them out and tossed them on the desk in front of him, trying not to show my annoyance. "Look," I said, "citizens with good intentions don't drive bodies around so early in the morning. In fact, they're not likely to —"

"Cripes!" interrupted the detective. "Now I know where I've seen you. You're Art Drake, the Greek Dragon, the Scholarly Strangler. You're the guy that knocked off Dinosaur Dinowski a couple of months back!"

"I didn't knock him off," I said. "I only knocked the wind out of him. The doctor's report said he died of heart failure."

"Yeah," said the detective, grinning stupidly as if we shared some secret confidence, "I saw the television of the fight. Lots of guys would die of heart failure with a belt like that one you gave him in the solar appleplexy. Did you see him afterwards? Is that why you claim to be such an expert on stiffs?"

"No. The coffin was closed at the funeral. But there was a war recently, you know. Lots of people died in that. And probably lots more have died while we've been gassing here. It was a two-door Ford sedan, forty or forty-one from the shape of it. Pennsylvania plate-number TF 458."

Almost in spite of himself the detective automatically wrote this information down. But he wasn't going to let me forget that he was in charge. "What color?" he demanded.

"Orange and blue," I deadpanned.

He started to write it down, and then paused and gave me his best sleuth-like suspicious stare.

"All Pennsylvania license-plates are orange and blue," I explained, still deadpanning. "They have a map of the state in orange on a blue background. It's known as the Keystone State because —"

"The car, wise guy!" barked the detective. "Not the plates! What color was the *car?*"

Maybe I shouldn't have done it, but I couldn't resist it. Here the man was piddling around with useless routine while the car — and the body, if any — was getting farther and farther away or safely into a trusted garage. "White," I said. "You see, Detective Martin, it's snowing."

A really mean look came over the detective's face. I could see at once that he was sensitive about being kidded. "Look, wise guy," he growled, "I know you were a big shot athlete in college and all that sort of stuff, but I don't like anybody trying to give *me* the works, see? I can lock you up right now as accessory after the fact. Why'd you help a guy push a car with a body in it?"

"You haven't even started to find out whether there *was* a body in it," I couldn't help retorting. "Wouldn't your Chief of the Homicide Squad be interested to know that the murderer, if he is one, has had over half an hour to get away since I last saw him?"

Detective Martin grunted a few well chosen words, picked up the

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telephone, and finally went into action about a general alarm.

Even Dale Carnegie would have agreed that our mutual respect and admiration had gone just about as far as they could for one morning, so I took the detective's new activity as a cue to ease myself out and home.

I didn't have to shape up at the garage that afternoon until four o'clock, but I had other things than taxis and corpses on my mind; so I set the alarm for eleven, and before noon was knocking on the door of Honeybunch's hotel room, armed with two bottles of cold champagne.

Honeybunch was half dressed and halfway through breakfast, as I had known she would be at that hour. And, as usual, she was thoroughly and completely beautiful. Nothing halfway about that. Her shape was one which made caption writers give up looking for words when they published her publicity shots. Usually her photos just came out over her name, the name of the night club she was working in at the time, and something like *Zowie!* or *Oooooof!* And she had a face to go with it, too — sultry, inviting, vivacious, and pixie, all at once. Men didn't steal furtive glances at Honeybunch. They stared at her.

She greeted me affably enough, but her kiss lacked the usual warmth that always told me I was the only man in the world for her. Something was bothering her. "What are we celebrating?" she asked as I popped the first bottle of champagne.

"My new job."

We drank the first drink in silence, and I noticed that Honeybunch was regarding me intently with a combination of knowingness and curiosity. "What is this new job?" she asked, as I refilled our glasses.

"It's in transportation."

Honeybunch pouted and set down her glass. "Yes, I know all about it," she declared. "And I think it's terrible that a man with your brains and ability and your, uh, well, your physique, and everything, should be driving a taxi. Why, most of the millionaires in the world are pipsqueaks compared to you. You ought to be on top of whatever —"

"Thanks, darling," I interrupted. "I love you for it. But how in blazes did you know?"

Honeybunch couldn't help grinning that million-dollar grin of hers despite her disapproval. She fished around among the disheveled bed covers and produced an early edition copy of *The Evening Post*, and there on page three was the whole story. That horse's-behind of a detective had apparently decided that a bit of free advertising would help things along. The story, a "feature," was under the by-line of Hymie Zigler, an old friend of Honeybunch's and mine. And he had laid it on thick. He had dug up an old publicity shot of me in wrestling trunks, flexing my muscles and beating my breast — looking for all the world like Tarzan trying to get rid of a hangover. And of course there was one of Detective Martin,

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looking fatuously important, and mouthing the usual platitudes about "dragnets" and "combing the city."

"Why don't *you* solve the case and become a famous detective?" Honeybunch burbled as I read. "Then you wouldn't have to be a nasty taxi driver, and could make a lot of money, and we could be married and everything."

"Look, Honeybunch," I said. "Taxi drivers aren't nasty. And I'm only going to do it long enough to learn about the business, and then try to raise some money to buy some cabs of my own. It's a tough, cockeyed business, but a good one if you're your own boss. But it takes a lot of green stuff to get going. Just a medallion for one cab costs better than thirty-five hundred dollars. That's the little aluminum shield the Hack Bureau attaches to a cab to show it's properly licensed. The fee for it is only ten dollars but the number of medallions issued is strictly limited, and they can't be bought and sold — the ownership has to be transferred when the cab itself is bought. So an old load worth maybe three hundred as junk will cost you better than four thousand with its medallion and a meter in working order. It's a lot of money, but once you own three or four of them you're sitting pretty. What the hell, Honeybunch, it's a business — just like any other. And, hell, I don't like the job *you* have, either."

Honeybunch pouted prettily, but she didn't protest, because she didn't like her job singing and dancing at *The Monkey's Uncle* any more than I did — or, rather, she didn't like her boss, Monk Blatt, any more than I did. He was a slimy little number who had started throwing heavy passes at her the first night she went to work there, and kept it up all evening until I came in and she introduced me to him as her fiancé. Monk looked to me like the type who might be brave with a gun in his hand, or with a couple of gorillas in front of him, but he didn't seem to like the looks of my two hundred fifteen pounds, and after the introduction he left Honeybunch alone — except with his eyes.

"I guess we're both in the same boat," she admitted, as I popped the second bottle. "But darling, darling, *darling*, let's be sure it's only temporary."

"Here's to temporariness," I toasted.

After that, things got better, and I had almost as hard a time tearing myself away to get to the garage on time as I had had going overseas.

The rest of the papers had picked up Hymie's story, and things at the garage were popping. Detective Martin and a couple of his Homicide pals were there waiting for me to "check up," as they explained. And half a dozen feature-story writers wanted angles on my life and hard times. The other waiting hackies glowered at me with envy and distrust. They didn't seem to like having a queer in their midst. And I didn't like it, either. I managed to get the newspapermen and detectives arguing with each other about what should be printed

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and what shouldn't, and got out of there as soon as the day man pulled the load in and gassed it up.

As long as I kept busy I didn't mind the job too much, and I was usually pretty busy right up to the theater break. Then, when calls became scarcer, I always had a hard time keeping my mind off Honeybunch. So I began to make it a habit to pull up across the street from *The Monkey's Uncle* around midnight. The first time the doorman saw me get out and take my badge off, he goggled at me. But I was clean, and pretty well dressed, so he didn't try to stop me from going in. Occasionally, I had to make up for lost time by riding the ghost back to the garage, but sitting around with Honeybunch, or watching her act, was so much more civilized a way of passing a couple of the small hours than pushing drunks and floozies around that it was worth the loss. And the drinks, within reason, were on the house.

Days passed, and nothing broke on the "body" story. Hymie Zigler needled the cops with think-pieces about how baffled they were, but interest had long since waned, and his editor finally told him to lay off. One interesting thing he told me, though. The car in question, strangely enough, had not been reported stolen — *and* neither had its owner, one Thomas Duncan of Philadelphia, been reported missing. Something screwy there, all right. Nobody's family or pals could be *that* indifferent. Even Dracula would probably have had somebody miss him if he had disappeared.

Honeybunch was fascinated. She kept insisting that I should solve the case and become a great private detective. But I wouldn't have known how to go about becoming *any* kind of detective, let alone a great one. That is to say, I wouldn't have known how unless I was stuck with it. And I was.

Sometimes when I left *The Monkey's Uncle* I would get a fare away from there if there didn't happen to be any cabs waiting in the line. But one night I got a fare away from there as soon as I pulled up. Before I had a chance to take my badge off and get out, two men, who had apparently been waiting under the canopy, hurried across the street and climbed in. I remember being surprised that the canopy taxi light hadn't been flashing, or that the doorman hadn't been making a great show of blowing his whistle in hope of a big tip. But a glance showed me that the doorman wasn't even there.

When one of the fares said, "Penn Station, Long Island side," I had a vague feeling I had heard his voice somewhere before, but it's an embarrassing thing to turn around and stare at a passenger, so I threw the flag down and drove off.

As we passed street lights I tried to get a glimpse of the passengers in the rear view mirror; but it was cold, and my load's heater probably hadn't been working properly since before the war, so they were all bundled up, with

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their hats pulled down and their coat collars up over their faces.

At Penn Station one of them said, "Keep your flag down. My friend's getting off here, and you can take me on to Fifty-first and Third. And there's a half a sawbuck in it for you if there's no talking. I want to think. So long, Charlie."

It wasn't the same voice as before, yet as the other man slammed the door behind him and hurried off toward the train gates I had a definite impression that the man who stayed in the cab was the one who had given me the first directions.

I was more than willing to keep my mouth shut because I had already become bored with talking to passengers and answering the same dreary question as to what a "cultivated" or "educated" person like myself could "possibly be doing driving a hack." But five dollars seemed to be a steep price to pay for a few minutes' silence, and it made me curious.

At Thirty-fourth and Eighth the traffic light was red. I maneuvered the cab under the street lamp so it would shine directly through the sky-view roof while we were waiting. My taciturn passenger was squeezed into the left-hand corner, leaning back. So I adjusted the rear-view mirror askew and got a good look at his face. Somehow I wasn't too surprised to recognize him as the scared and nervous driver of the Pennsylvania car in the Bronx. He seemed to be staring straight back at me, glassy-eyed, but I was certain he couldn't have recognized me because the only light in my end of the cab was the dim one on the meter. I pushed the mirror back to its proper adjustment, and turned west on Thirty-fourth as the light changed.

Hell, it was just too easy. There were some twenty-eight thousand cops in the city looking for this bird, and there were about eleven thousand cabs on the streets that he could have chosen instead of mine. And there was a police station on Fifty-first Street between Third and Lex. It was made to order and was going to call for more champagne and stuff with Honeybunch.

I didn't even see any reason to take a chance on gunplay. If I had tried to get fancy he might have pulled one and held it against my head while I was driving, and that wouldn't have proved anything to anybody — except maybe to him.

So I took it easy all the way up to Lexington and Fiftieth, and then made a left turn through a red light on Third Avenue right in front of a northbound bus. I figured that if there were a cop there he would stop me, and I could give him the wink and grab Mr. Sphinx before he had a chance to get at the artillery. Or if the bus driver, in trying to avoid the elevated pillars, sideswiped me, same story. But there was no cop, and the bus driver was fast with his brakes. So, as I jammed on my brakes, instead of the sound of a whistle, or the crunching of a running board and fender, all I heard was the thump of a

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body falling on the floor of the cab.

He was dead.

It wasn't easy to talk the bus driver out of a fight — not with his passengers backing him up and yelling how I was a menace to civilization. But four dirty dollar-bills folded inside my chauffeur's license when I handed it to him fixed that. He returned the license mumbling something about not letting it happen again. I jumped back into the load, made a left turn on Fifty-first, and parked just beyond the Fire Department clearance sign, almost directly opposite the two green lights of the Police Station.

But it wasn't so easy to figure any more. If you turn in a live man wanted by the police, you're a hero of sorts. But if you're a cabby, no matter what you do is wrong as far as the cops are concerned. And I was a cabby. And the character curled up on the floor of my cab was not alive. I wasn't really frightened, mind you, but what I would have preferred doing was to unload the body right there and just quietly go away. But, hell, I hadn't committed any crime, and dumping the body, I knew, would have been a serious one. So I marched into the station house.

I tossed my badge and picture on the lieutenant's desk and said, "I seem to be riding the ghost in my cab. Only this time there's a body to go with it — a dead one."

I didn't blame the lieutenant for having me frisked, but I did rather resent being handcuffed to one of the cops during the subsequent proceedings. I had to stay inside answering questions while the police photographers, laboratory analysts, detectives, and doctors went through their routine on the cab and body.

Of course, the more questions I answered, the more deeply I seemed to become involved personally in the mess. And then, to make matters even duckier, my old pal Detective Martin breezed in with an I-don't-know-what-it's-all-about-but-I-told-you-so look on his face. It seemed to be standard police procedure to have the detective who was first assigned to a case carry through with it. So there he was in all his glory. Fortunately, the Deputy Chief of Homicide was there too.

I don't suppose they really thought they were going to find any identifying papers on the body, but they all seemed disappointed when they didn't. Laundry marks, store labels, and such might take days.

"It's obviously either Thomas Duncan," I volunteered, "or the man who was carrying Duncan's body around that morning. I *know* it's the man who was driving that Pennsy Ford."

"Don't you agree," asked the Deputy, "that it looks like more than a coincidence — the fact that the, uh, deceased, happened to take *your* cab tonight?"

"It sure does," I agreed. "But after all the publicity our friend Martin here saw fit to give the case, it would have been fairly easy for someone who wanted to use me as an alibi to spot my driving routine and then use my

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cab on purpose. By the way, what did the fellow die of?"

"Heart failure," said the Deputy.

I kept a dead pan, but I thought I could discern the slow beginning of turning wheels inside Detective Martin's thick skull.

"The kind of heart failure," the Deputy went on, "that is caused by a knife being stuck into it. Damned sharp knife, too. Pierced all those clothes like a needle. Now, you say it would have been fairly simple for someone to spot your driving routine. I agree with you there. But that somebody would have to hate your guts pretty thoroughly, wouldn't he? Now who do you know that hates you that much?"

"I can't think of anybody. But I don't agree with you on the hate angle. Somebody just thought he saw an easy out. About the identification — why not grab the garagemen where this Duncan character kept his car?"

The Deputy looked at his watch. "They're at the morgue now. We had them flown up from Philly along with Duncan's landlady."

"And how about the personnel at *The Monkey's Uncle?*" I asked. I might as well have saved my breath, for at that moment I heard a squeal of delight which could have come from the throat of only one female in the world. Honeybunch burst into the detectives' room and threw herself into my arms — or rather into my left arm, for my right one was still manacled to the cop's.

"Oh, my darling," she gurgled. "I was scared stiff! At first I thought they were talking about identifying *your* body, and then they told me you were all right but they wouldn't let me see you until they led me through some *dead* people, my dear, as if *I* would know any dead people, and of course I didn't, but, oh my darling, here you are —"

She might have gone on chattering like that for a long time but she noticed the handcuff and stopped short. "What is the meaning of *that?*" she demanded. "Remove it immediately!"

Detective Martin flushed and looked sullen. But the Deputy almost smiled. "Take it off," he said quietly.

Martin looked as if he had been whacked across the behind with a bull whip, but he did as he was told, and I put my freed arm where it seemed most fitting.

We waited while the identification reports came in. Both the garagemen and Duncan's landlady swore that they had never seen the corpse before. And, one by one, so did everybody at *The Monkey's Uncle*, from Monk Blatt right down to the doorman.

"Somebody, apparently, is lying," said the Deputy Inspector significantly. He hadn't addressed his remark to anyone in particular, but it was obviously my cue.

"Remember," I said, "I didn't say I saw them coming *out* of the club. I just assumed that they *had* come out because they were under the canopy.

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Too bad the doorman wasn't there."

"It *is* too bad," the Inspector agreed quickly. "The funny thing is that the doorman doesn't remember leaving his stand at all. Of course he might have gone to, uh, wash up and forgotten about it, but he says he's pretty sure not."

"He must be a man of considerable endurance," was all I could think of to say. "He goes on duty at eight o'clock. It was around midnight when I picked the men up."

"All the more reason you'd think he would remember," the Deputy insisted.

Unless he didn't want to, I thought. Then another thought struck me. "Did you, or whoever questioned him, smell his breath? He can't get anything to drink out there on the street, you know."

"His breath did smell of liquor. But he said the bartender sneaked him a few bracers when they learned they were all going to have to go down to the morgue. So somebody's lying." The Deputy made it so clear by his tone that he wasn't accusing me of lying that even Honeybunch didn't bridle defensively at that one. He was simply making a statement of fact.

Well, I knew *I* wasn't lying; so, for the first time since the whole mess had started, there was a faint little glimmer of light in my mind — the doorman *was* lying. His reason might have had nothing to do with the murder, but it probably had. So if I got out of there that night — and it began to look as if I might — I knew exactly what my first move as a detective was going to be.

The questions and answers all petered off into dead ends and ended up in one great big dead end. The story was that an unidentified man, alone in a taxi, had been stabbed through the heart by a non-existent what-is-it. Not much to go on, but the Deputy seemed to be a man who didn't ruffle easily. "We'll have positive identification in the morning," he declared. "If not through the clothes, his picture in the papers will bring us dozens of people who know him. Now I know the little lady here is tired. You're the only witness there is in the case, and I could hold you — for months, if necessary — until the case breaks. But I don't see any need for that. I know you're not going to skip or do anything foolish, and we'll be in touch with you."

I'm sure you will — constantly, I thought. And I know why you're letting me go, too — to worry the guilty one and make him wonder *why* I'm not being held.

Honeybunch said good night prettily, and I was already shaking hands with the Deputy when Detective Martin's wheels spun into high gear. "I know!" he exploded. "Dinosaur Dinowski!"

"Well, good night," I said.

"Wait a minute!" growled Detective Martin. "The Deputy, here, wanted to know who'd be hating your guts." He looked at me as if that were a particularly easy one to answer. "Well, Dinowski's got relatives, ain't

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he? Well, maybe this stiff's one of them. Maybe he tried to bump you off to get even. So it was self-defense, but what'd you do? You knocked him off instead!"

"You're letting that great big imagination of yours run away with you," I said. "Good night, all."

"Sorry," said the Deputy. "We have to check on everything."

Less than an hour later I was back in handcuffs, and Dinosaur Dinowski's widow was screaming "murderer" at me. The corpse was one Andrew Logan, her brother.

They wouldn't let Honeybunch stay around after that. She left with her eyes flashing indignantly.

I had seen Mrs. Dinowski once before — at the funeral of her late husband, the Dinosaur. She was a well built redhead, even more attractive than the usual ex-show girl, but she had the manners of a magpie, and she seemed to delight in spilling the whole sordid story of the Dinosaur-Dragon fight. It had been fixed, of course, so the colorful Dinosaur could get a crack at the champion, and I was supposed to lose — quite a feat of histrionics considering what a muscle-bound hunk of blubber the Dinosaur was. So she kept shouting that I had doublecrossed him and killed him. The truth, as I told the cops, was that I had let the big bum get a toe hold on me and, instead of faking it, he had really put the pressure on. Well, I was willing to throw the fight, but I wasn't willing to get a broken ankle in the process. Nobody can stand the pressure of a real toe hold; that's why it's outlawed in honest amateur wrestling. So I broke the hold, and in breaking it had to play a little rough. Even so, the doctors had called it heart failure.

The cops — except for brother Martin — seemed to see my side of it, but the magpie screamed on. She, it seemed, had inherited her husband's ten medallions and had signed them over to her brother, because she didn't know anything about running a taxi business. And then I had killed her brother to get the medallions, because everybody knew that every punk of a taxi driver was crazy to start his own fleet.

I tried to point out that killing him wouldn't have got me the medallions unless he had signed them over to me first, and the cops agreed to that. But I was so tied up in every single angle of the whole mess that they booked me on suspicion of murder.

But they hadn't counted on Honeybunch. Around ten in the morning a gray-haired guard with a painfully quizzical expression approached my cell, key in hand. "I've seen things and things," he muttered as he opened the door, "but what in the name of jumping Jericho are them women doing in court with that dignified lawyer?"

Honeybunch, I realized, had been to see my mother, and the impression they were creating in the courtroom was indeed rather epic. My mother, I should explain, comes from one of

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New York's oldest families, the Van Meers. She had been one of Isadora Duncan's pupils, had charged romantically off to Greece in her youth and had married one of Greece's few well-known poets. That's where I came in with the name Papadracopoulos — whether I liked poetry or not. My mother still affected ancient Greek dress — stylized, straight-hanging gown, chlamys over shoulders and one arm, and even sandals, her only concession being to wear stockings with them in the winter, New York weather being more inclement than that of Athens. She had some vague theory that the only way the modern world could save itself from destruction was by emulating the ancient Greeks. And she would do almost anything for anybody who agreed with her.

Honeybunch, I saw, had obviously agreed with her, for she too was wearing a Greek costume with such an effect that for the first time I began to think it might have its advantages. But then, Honeybunch would have looked well in anything.

Old Mr. Dixon, of Dixon, Dixon, Reade, & Dixon, probably for the first time in his life was having something of a struggle to maintain his dignity and composure. He and his forebears had been my mother's family's counsellors for generations, and this, undoubtedly, was the first time a Dixon had ever been retained in a criminal case. But I had to hand it to the old boy. He spouted his habeas corpuses and mandamuses, and in a few minutes the judge was actually bowing us out of the courtroom almost apologetically.

It was the first time I had seen my mother in several months. We didn't see exactly eye to eye on my intellectual pursuits, or lack of them. And she was a woman of determination. I had persuaded her over to the wrestling wheeze because it was a Greek sport, and in fact, it was she who had first hired instructors to teach the art to her little Greek god. But taxi driving was a Greek of another century, and she insisted that I "cease forthwith."

I surprised her by agreeing immediately. I didn't bother to tell her that I had undoubtedly lost my job for being hot, and that I couldn't get another job because the Homicide men had sent my picture and badge down to the Hack Bureau pending disposition of the case. I just let her think I was being won over by her better judgement, and Honeybunch, sensing some ulterior motive, put in a masterpiece of diplomatic agreement. So the long and short of it was that I had a sizeable wad of cash in hand when we let mother out of a cab in front of her house on Fifth Avenue.

"Lord, what a night," sighed Honeybunch, cuddling up to me. "Take me to the hotel, darling, where I can get out of this Athenian nightshirt and into a bath."

"All right." I gave the driver the address. "And while you're dressing I'll look up that doorman and come back to you with some champagne to

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celebrate what I'm going to learn from him."

"No need of that, I knew he was lying when he told the Deputy he hadn't left his post," cooed Honeybunch. "He's just a harmless rummy. He went into my dressing room as I left it to go on for my first act. I let him keep a bottle in there."

"Then why in the name of Zeus didn't you tell the Inspector that?"

"I thought it would just get everything more involved and complicated, and that they'd waste a lot more time questioning him, and you'd just have to stay there that much longer."

"I had to stay there all night, anyway."

"Yes, but don't you remember, darling, that was before that awful Dinosaur woman came screeching in. It looked then as if they were just going to let you go, and I didn't see any reason to delay things."

"I used to admire you for your brains," I said as the cab pulled up to the hotel, "but from now on I guess I'll just have to consider your beauty."

Honeybunch stared at me with stricken eyes. "Why, Artie," she protested, "you actually sound as if you didn't believe me."

"Don't be silly," I said. "Of course I believe you. I just think you weren't very bright. Now look, you run on up and I'll join you later with some champagne."

"I'm going with you."

"No you're not — not in that outfit. Besides, I'm only going to the Hack Bureau."

A little later I had a lot more respect for Mrs. Dinowski's ravings about her medallions — or, rather those of her brother, the late Andrew Logan, for they were in his name. But what she hadn't mentioned was that all ten of them had a lien on them for thirty thousand dollars to an outfit called the Glo-Sam Holding Corporation. She probably didn't know it or she would have felt like killing him herself. But nobody who knew the score would have killed him for medallions with a lien on them — dirty medallions, they're called in the trade. So he had either been bopped off for the cash, or somebody — some dear pal of Mrs. Dinowski's — had learned about the lien and bumped him off for *not* coming across with her cash. The lady's recent love life would bear looking into. She wasn't the type who would be apt to mourn her husband's demise in solitude.

A check on the cross files revealed that the Glo-Sam Holding Corporation was not holding peanuts. For, in addition to those ten medallions, it also held liens on forty-six other cabs, and owned ninety per cent partnership of fifty-eight more in five different small fleets under the names of five different ten per cent owners in various garages around the city.

The address listed for the corporation was a West Forty-second Street one, but there was no telephone number given. I went to the bar on the corner of Cortlandt and looked it up. It wasn't listed.

Traffic looked bad, so I took the

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subway up to Forty-second. The address turned out to be the Fontaine Theater Building, one of those dismal ex-legitimate theaters showing fourth-run horror movies and the like. Glo-Sam wasn't listed among the half-dozen shady enterprises on the directory board, and the superintendent said it must be the single-room office on the third floor with no name on the door. I tried it but got no answer.

Getting Mr. Dixon personally on the telephone was a problem comparable to getting the Maharajah of Poonipur, but using the name Van Meer instead of Papadracopoulos helped, and after wading through half a dozen secretaries and junior partners I was finally allowed to talk with him. I laid it on thick about life and death, and speed being of the essence, and told him to report his findings to Miss Ellis at the Marlborough Hotel.

Mr. Dixon had already phoned Honeybunch by the time I got back to her room with the cold champagne. "I never knew before that Monk's first name was Samuel," she greeted me.

"Anybody else in on it?"

"Just his wife. Gloria F. Blatt — she's the president. He's the treasurer."

"Hasn't he got a big estate somewhere? Hasn't he a famous collection of old automobiles or something?"

"Larchmont," she said.

"Look, Honeybunch," I said. "I want you to phone Mr. Blatt's place and be Mr. Somebody-or-other's secretary. Tell them your employer has a nineteen-four Franklin and a nineteen-thirteen Mercer dirt-track racer, and that he would like to come out this afternoon and talk over a deal."

Monk, she was told, was not in, but could be reached at the club all afternoon. But it was not necessary to bother Mr. Blatt, himself, she was assured, because Mr. Blatt's chief mechanic handled all the auto transactions. And would she talk to the mechanic, Mr. MacIntyre? She certainly would. It was working out better than I had hoped. She made the date for four thirty which just gave me time to get into some less ratty clothes, and hire a limousine.

The estate was a shop girl's dream of heaven. It must have been an old one redone in the twenties by the "cultured" wife of a multimillionaire bootlegger. The main building was highly suggestive of a combination of the Taj Mahal and St. Sophia.

The garages, though not so ugly, were almost as extensive as the main building, and Mr. MacIntyre, a dour individual who seemed to look on the world with general mistrust, presided over them like a monarch. I made noises about my mythical old cars, and he professed some interest in them as he showed me Monk Blatt's collection. It was truly remarkable — if you like old cars. They were all in perfect condition and could be started in an instant. This, in spite of the fact that parts for most of them had long ceased to exist. The answer lay in Mr. Mac's ultra modern machine

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shop which boasted just about every possible machine tool necessary for making anything. He could even do heavy work such as mantling or dismantling an entire chassis.

We must have spent over an hour wandering around and palavering. In the central garage where the modern cars were housed, I noticed the outline in fresh cement where an old-fashioned lubrication pit had been filled up. The parts of the new hydraulic lift which was to replace it were stacked against the wall. "Should have used the old pit as the base hole for the hydraulic shaft," I ventured.

"Just what I told Mr. Blatt," agreed the mechanic. "But the new lift hadn't been delivered yet, and the fool of a contractor didn't understand what we were doing. All he knew was that the old pit had to be filled up, so he went right ahead and filled it up."

We talked some about the price I wanted for my non-existent cars, and I tried to get him to commit himself to go to see them that very evening at my hypothetical estate in Greenwich. But he said he'd have to talk it over with Mr. Blatt first, and that he'd let me know. It was already dark when we said goodbye.

I had the chauffeur drive me to a bar I knew in New Rochelle and took him in with me for a drink. While he was drinking his boilermaker-and-his-helper, I took my champagne into the telephone booth and called Honeybunch. "Better send a bellhop out for a cold bottle," I said, "so I won't be drinking alone."

"Beast!" said Honeybunch. "You sound smug. Have you solved everything?"

"I think so. But I'll have to play around for an hour or so yet."

"Be careful, darling. I'll get several bottles and *then* we can be careless."

The chauffeur and I had a couple more. Then I told him to drive me back to Blatt's place. I had him park with the lights out a couple of hundred yards from the main gate. I was glad I had given him the drinks because he could see that this was monkey business and might not have liked it cold sober. I went over the high iron-picket fence behind the garage buildings. I wouldn't have dared try the garage door even if I had thought it was unlocked, because I didn't want to get between the garage and the brightly lighted cottage where I assumed Mr. Mac lived. I eased along the back of the central building until I came to the one window I knew was there. I knew it was catch-locked because I had seen it earlier from inside. I took a small rock, wrapped it in my coat, and sharply tapped the little pane directly under the catch. It didn't make much noise breaking, but when the pieces hit the cement floor inside it sounded like the proverbial skeletons on a tin roof in a hailstorm. I stood still and don't think I moved for a full ten minutes.

Then I raised the window and climbed inside. What I was interested in was a neat pile of heavy chassis metal I had noticed in one corner of

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the shop. I edged over to it carefully and when my foot touched it I squatted, and lighted and shielded a match. The door flew open and the lights blazed on at exactly the same instant. I whirled around and found myself blinking into the muzzle of a .38.

Monk didn't say a word, and that, I knew, was bad. He obviously wasn't hesitating about pulling the trigger; he was probably considering beforehand how he was going to get rid of the body. Personally, I thought it was one hell of a useless way to die. There was no use in trying to bluff it by telling him several people knew I was there; he and his hired hand could simply swear that they had never seen me. Besides, I had a strong feeling — call it fear, if you like — that any words on my part would precipitate a shot. But, hell, I couldn't just stand there and wait for it. So I walked slowly toward him. It was a rough chance but it was slightly better than no chance at all. I figured that he wouldn't fire until I was within about six feet of him. So I planned on trying to make a flying tackle from about eight feet, and maybe not get the bullet through a vital part.

I figured wrong. His finger touched the trigger long before I was anywhere near enough to him. And he was an ice-cold cookie. He kept careful aim at my midriff, and started to squeeze instead of jerking.

I don't know how I had time or sense enough to notice it, but at the blast his arm flew up as if he had been firing a .45 instead of a .38. I didn't know where I was hit, or how badly. I just dived as I had never dived before.

Monk hit the floor with a thump.

"Now why the hell did you have to go and do a thing like that?" demanded an unpleasantly familiar voice. "The guy will be out for hours. Maybe you even killed him." Detective Martin, revolver in hand, marched over and felt Monk's pulse.

"I never thought I'd be glad to see *you*," I said weakly, feeling my belly and looking around for blood. But the only blood was on Monk Blatt. His right elbow was a shattered mess.

I was feeling pretty giddy. "I'll see to it personally," I said, "that you get a medal for expert marksmanship."

"Already got it," grunted the detective. "What the hell *is* this rat-race, anyway, charging around the country in a hired limousine? Why was this guy trying to knock you off? I'd better get the Deputy Inspector."

"Yes, you'd better," I agreed happily. "And tell him to send along a police emergency wrecking crew — with a couple of pneumatic drills."

Detective Martin and his patrolman assistant set up a GHQ in the great hall of the Taj Mahal, and had the local doctor supervise moving Monk there. Mrs. Blatt was hysterical, and Mr. MacIntyre was sullen and uncommunicative.

I managed to make a pal of the butler, and soon had champagne flowing freely — on the pretext that it would

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help soothe Mrs. Blatt. Then I phoned Honeybunch and told her to get hold of Hymie Zigler and hotfoot it up there.

By the time they all got there, Monk Blatt was beginning to come around to the doctor's ministrations. I was feeling pretty much like a movie detective hero, but I couldn't very well give out with my theory until the emergency crew went to work on the new cement in the old lubrication pit.

They found the body there, all right, and the identifiable parts of the car, the ones that were too heavy to be cut up by an acetylene torch.

The Deputy congratulated me; Honeybunch looked at me adoringly; and Hymie Zigler asked, "What's the pitch?"

"Due to the dogged determination, fearless intrepidity, and unerring almost superhuman marksmanship of Detective Francis X. Martin," I said, "Justice at last has caught up with Monk Blatt, mastermind of the dirty medallion racket."

"Lay off the corn," said Hymie, "and come down to cases."

Detective Martin was giving me his usual dirty look. The guy was so dumb he didn't even realize I was flattering him. "Seriously," I said, "by tailing me around all day Martin saved my life. So give him a break in the story."

Martin's jaw dropped and he looked at me goggle-eyed. I hoped I would never see him again, but there wasn't any harm in parting friends.

"This 'Thomas Duncan' or whatever-his-real-name-was character," I explained, "must have been a young nitwit dumb enough to believe he was going to be another 'partner' of Monk's. So Monk must have had him picking up cheap medallions one way or another — from widows of individual owners or women who didn't have the foggiest notion of their true value — or by giving outrageous loans on them with a fake foreclosing date that the gorillas could confront recalcitrant owners with. Then, when this Duncan had ten or so medallions — in the name of the Glo-Sam Corporation, don't forget — Monk had Andy Logan bump him off, thinking that *he*, poor sap, was going to be in the gravy. Then — but let's have some more wine. My throat's dry from talking so much."

Honeybunch solicitously poured a round, starting with me and ending with me because I had already finished mine by the time she had filled the other glasses. She even offered Monk some, remembering, no doubt, that it belonged to him in the first place. But he just glowered at her.

"Then brother Logan found himself behind the eight-ball," I went on. "Just how much of the actual cash he ever saw of the loan on his, or rather his sister's, medallions, I wouldn't venture to say. Probably very little. Monk, with characteristic business sagacity, figured it would be more profitable and *much* more fun to bump him off and plant the body on me. So he gave him some bull story

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about a trip to Long Island — probably for more medallions — made sure of getting my cab, stabbed him on the way to the station, and pretended to be Logan giving me directions as he got out of the cab — that's why he offered me a fin for not talking; I might have got suspicious when the corpse didn't answer. And about his hating me, I didn't know it when I answered your questions, Inspector, but I guess he did because I was standing in the way of something he desperately wanted — Honeybunch."

She blushed demurely and poured us all some more champagne.

"By tonight he was in it so deep he *had* to come back from the club and get rid of me when Mr. Mac, here, phoned him that I was snooping around. He might even have covered *that* one up, too, but I doubt it, Inspector, with such an astute mind as Detective Martin's working on the case. As to the exact identity of the late, unlamented, cement-coated Mr. Duncan, if Monk Blatt won't talk — and there's no reason why he shouldn't now — a canvass of all the recent ex-owners of taxis in the city will do the trick."

"This will mean a police commendation and star on your hack picture," said the Inspector, shaking my hand.

"Oh, no it won't," cried Honeybunch, "because he's not going to be a taxi driver any more. He's going to be a private detective."

"And what am I going to use for money until I get going?" I grinned. "The only way *I* can think of getting plenty of ready cash is to put on a Greek nightshirt and play Olympic Games with mother — and that wouldn't blend so well with the detective racket."

"*I* can help you," declared Honeybunch. "I still have *my* job — or *have* I?"

"I'm afraid not," said the Inspector. "At least not under the same management."

"Well," conceded Honeybunch, "maybe you'll have to drive a *little* longer. Just what will this police commendation mean, Inspector?"

"He'll be able to get away with murder in traffic," the Inspector explained, "through red lights and sassing cops back."

Honeybunch's eyes lighted up. "*That'll* be fun!" she admitted. "I've always wanted to do that. Come on, darling."

On the way back to the city we drank out of a bottle because we hadn't thought it right to take any of Monk's glasses. Honeybunch snuggled up to me and cooed, "Before we get married will you promise me one thing?"

"What?"

"*Never* call me Honeybunch again. I *hate* it."

"*O diavalos echei polla podia*," I replied.

"That's Greek," said Honeybunch.

"Yes, I know."

She pinched me hard. "But what does it *mean?*" she demanded.

"The devil has many legs."

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"Seamark" is the pseudonym of an English writer named Austin J. Small. We know nothing of Mr. Small's background or personality. According to our records he is the author of some melodramatically titled novels — like THE AVENGING RAY, THE CRIMSON DEATH, THE SILENT SIX, *and* THE WEB OF MURDER — *and a book of short stories called* OUT OF THE DARK. *A paper-bound copy of the volume of shorts is frankly labeled "A Seamark Thriller," and the tales themselves are described as "Keep-You-Awake Stories." Neither Mr. Small's real name nor his pseudonym is even mentioned in the two best contemporary reference books, Howard Haycraft's* MURDER FOR PLEASURE *and* THE ART OF THE MYSTERY STORY. *But sufficient unto the day is one item of information: one of "Seamark's" short stories is the kind of tale which, once read, can never be forgotten. You may forget the author's true name or pen-name; you may forget the precise unfolding of the plot; you may forget the name of the chief character, or the story's title, or that you first read the tale in EQMM; but if you forget the story's* point, *if you ever forget this story's* initial impact, *then we shall retire to a monastery in Tibet. This tale, slight as it is in structure, has the shape and form of a classic.*

QUERY

by "SEAMARK"

THOMAS MASTERICK looked dully at the little square of gray sky behind his cell window. He had come to regard it as something of an entity, something almost possessing life. It had a unique talent. It was the only thing in his cell that ever changed. It was a tiny, slow-moving picture in a world that was fixed and motionless. He talked to it in a low, uncomplaining monotone that was cowlike in its contemplative absence of expression. For fifteen years he had been talking to various objects in his cell, reasoning with them vaguely on his one cankering grievance against life.

Not that it was a grievance in the ordinary sense of the word, for there was not a scrap of resentment in the soul of Thomas Masterick. Only a dim perplexity, a puzzlement that refused to submit to elucidation no matter how earnestly he tried to think it out. All he asked of life was an explanation, a reason for the unfair thing life had done to him. And he could never quite get down to that explanation. It eluded him persistently. A thousand times he had tried to think down to the real reason. And he had overdone it. Later he came to realize that that was probably why he could no longer think as easily as he used to.

"The trouble is," he admitted to

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the gray square, "I've been thinking too much. I've had too many thinks. A lot too many thinks. I know I have; because now when I try to have a real good think all I get is a bad dizzy. And these dizzies make my head ache. I've been having too many of them dizzies lately.

"But They can say what They like," he added moodily. "They can say what They like, but They can't say I killed Fred Smith. They can say and say and say. But that don't make out I killed him."

He sat on the edge of his stool and fretfully fingered the leaves of the Bible on the white-scrubbed table.

"Of course, the other trouble is," he said, "They think I did. And that's where They've got me. That's what makes it awkward. It's not much use me saying I didn't, if all the time They tell me I did. They don't believe me any more than I believe Them. They're the most awful crowd of liars I ever met.

"That long, lanky chap in the black gown — he was the worst of the lot. And he was the start of it. Never heard such a lying devil in all my life! Stood up in the middle of the court he did — in the middle of the court, mind you — and deliberately argued that I killed Fred Smith. And there was a hell of a crowd of people there. All listening. They must have heard it. Couldn't have done otherwise.

"And how could *he* know?" he asked with placid wonderment. "Eh? How *could* he know? He wasn't there. He admitted he'd never seen Fred Smith in his life. And he laughed when I asked him. I didn't like that laugh. So stinkin' cocky it was. He admitted he'd never seen me, not till that day They put me in court. So how could *he* know? Yet he stood in the very middle of that court and deliberately made out to the Judge how I did it. Stuck at it for four days he did. He was a marvel of a chap. He proved I did do it! Actually proved it. He was a marvel of a chap. Proved it as plain as plain. An absolute marvel of a chap. But the most Godforsaken liar I ever came across in my life.

"And the questions he asked. Couh! You'd have thought he'd known Smithy all his life. Long, lanky devil, he had me tied up all ways. Couldn't move a hand's turn. A fair knockout. He proved me a liar. And a perjurer. And a thief. And then he went and proved I killed Fred Smith. And that was where I had him. Because I never killed Fred Smith. I never saw Fred Smith that day. And if ever I get out of this I'll tell him so, too. Never such a chap in all my born days. Simply wouldn't listen to reason. And now it's raining like the very devil.

"I never told him any lies. I never told him any perjury. And I never nicked anything in my life. Well, not since I left school, anyway. And then for him to stand up in the middle of that court and say the things he did — well! It beats me. Beats me flat.

"And then the Judge told me he was going to hang me. I wish to Gord he had now. I wouldn't have been stuck here all this time. Can't make

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out why he didn't. They was so damn cocksure I'd done it. If I did, why didn't he hang me? If I'd done it, he ought to have hung me, and none of these half-larks. If I didn't do it, then They got no right to have me hung. And They haven't hung me. Looks precious much to me as if They ain't sure I did do it, after all.

"I knew it was going to rain. I knew it this morning. And I said so to Four-eighty-four out in the exercise. 'Ginger,' I said, 'it's going to rain.'

" 'I don't care a damn,' says Ginger.

" 'Before dinner,' I said.

" 'Will it?' says Ginger. 'I'll bet you three hundred thousand pounds it don't.'

"Well, I've got that to come, anyway. That ought to set me up a bit when I get outside. But I don't suppose I'll get it. He won't pay up. He never does. I don't believe he's got three hundred thousand pounds. He's a fly devil, is Ginger. Diff'rent as anything from Southampton Jack. Southampton Jack betted me a bread ration that I couldn't get him the result of the Derby before supper-time. Of course, I could get him the results of the Derby before supper-time. I know the ropes. After all the years I've been here I ought to know the ropes. People who don't know how to get hold of the ropes never ought to go to prison.

"But Ginger don't even pay up on a bread ration. He betted me a bread ration last Sunday that the chaplain would give out hymn number four-eighty-four in the evening. And he didn't. The biggest number he gave out was three hundred and eight. But that only shows how much Ginger knows about religion. Hymn number four-eighty-four is a Christmas hymn. And this ain't Christmas. Not by a long chalk. But he never paid up.

"Southampton Jack paid up next morning. Chucked it in my cell as he was passin' through to the exercise. That's the best of sailors. They're only fly devils sometimes. Mostly they're all right. He's here because he sold a lot of cargo. He says he'd go dotty if they put him in prison without him selling some cargo first. I'm here because I never killed Fred Smith. If I had of killed Fred Smith, They'd have hung me.

"Southampton Jack don't believe I killed Fred Smith. Don't believe a word of it.

" 'What? You?' he said. 'You killed Fred Smith? Not you, my cocker,' he said. 'You ain't got the guts to kill.'

"Which was quite right then. But ain't now. I wouldn't think twice about having a lam at that long, lanky devil who stood up in the middle of that court and spouted about me the way he did. It was him that got me lagged, I reckon.

"Sometimes I used to think I'd go dotty too when They put me in here without me first killing Fred Smith. But I don't get that way now. All I get is the dizzies. And only when I'm having too many thinks.

"It's funny old Ginger letting himself get caught over his own hymn number. You'd reckon they'd all

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know their own hymn numbers by the time they've been here a lot of years. When all you've got to read is that Bible and hymn-book. It makes you study 'em a bit. I must have read that Bible down a hundred times. And I'm hanged if I can see what there is in it for people to go raving crazy about. A finer pack of lies I never did see. Nor a bigger lot of twaddle. Unless it was the lot that long, lanky devil said about me in that court.

"Most of us know where we are in the hymn-book. Joe Bennett is a Holy Baptism and Tim Cheyne is a 'Piphany. There's a couple of Trinity Sundays down there past the wash-house, and all of 'em up there on the top landing are Lents. Me and the lags either side is Ember Days. I've been here years and years and I've never been sung yet. Dan Rafferty gets sung most. He's a Times of Trouble. But the best one is old Three-fifty-one. He's a Matrimony and he's in for a lot of bigamy. I reckon that's funny. Thinking about that has got me out of a dizzy many a time. Southampton Jack is a Harvest Festival and Tom Earle, who used to be a warder here once, is the only Rogation Day in this block. The other Rogation cells are full of scrubbing gear.

"In my honest opinion I don't believe Fred Smith ever was killed. I believe he took ship that day. It's just the sort of thing he would do. It would be just his delight to land me in the soup. He always said he would. And, my God, he did! He always went on sailing ships. And if he suddenly went off on one of those long Melbourne cruises of his, he wouldn't be heard of for months and months. More especially if he got bad winds. It would have been all over before he made land. All over and done with. And I'd have been put away prop'ly.

"Southampton Jack might know. He's been to sea long enough. Running east, too. He would tell me if he's heard anything about Smithy since I've been here. If he has, then all I've got to do is to wait till my time's up and go and find him. If I did find him I wouldn't half be able to take the mike out of that cocksure crowd in that court. I'd give 'em a shock all right. I'd make 'em think a bit too, I'll lay.

"And I don't believe that body They had up on that slab was old Freddy Smith at all. Smithy never wore a wrist-watch. He was a sailor. A blue water sailor. And I doubt if his eyesight was good enough to see the time by a wrist-watch. And I'm dead sure he never wore brown boots in his life. I've told the Governor that. And the Chaplain. And the Visiting Justices. But, you see, they didn't know Fred Smith. So they couldn't say. And they wouldn't believe me much, anyway — not after what that long, lanky devil said about me."

Rubber-shod feet and a jingle of steel went past his door and up the stairs of the main hall.

"That's old Neversweat," he observed. "Going up to start opening all the doors for dinner. Mutton broth and jackety spuds it'll be today. And

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no duff. Because there's bread. That ought to be all right. And after that we'll all have a bath. And after that Six-thirty-one will scrape the hide off our faces with that soddin' razor of his. And then we'll all be all right for Sunday. Six-thirty-one tries to make out he was a real barber before he came here. Couh! I pity his customers. Southampton Jack reckons his customers must have got him put away — if he really was a barber outside. Jack only let him shave him once. Then he put in to be allowed to grow a beard. The Governor laughed like hell when old Neversweat told him why."

The wards of the lock clanged solidly back to the thrust of a ponderous key.

"Basins," said the cookhouse orderly in front of an adequate warder.

Thomas Masterick received his dinner, and the warder poked his head into his cell.

"Number Three-five-four," he said, "you won't go through to exercise after dinner. You'll remain in your cell till the chaplain comes. He will see you this afternoon."

"Will he, sir? All right. Thank you."

The warder looked at him oddly. "You feeling unwell?" he snapped.

"No, sir. I'm all right. Only I think I've got one of my dizzies coming on. I'll be all right, sir, after this bit of broth."

"Well, take my tip when the chaplain comes, and look better than you do now. Or he will be having you trotted along to the infirmary. And you don't want that, do you?"

Masterick looked at him with a childlike incredulity. Of all the desirable heavens in the world of the penal prison the infirmary was the sweetest and best.

"I wouldn't mind going to the infirmary, sir," he said bleakly. "It's very nice in the infirmary."

Regardless of the din of impatient basins and spoons lower down the corridor, the warder stepped right into the cell.

"Say, Three-fifty-four, don't you know what he is going to see you for?"

Masterick looked up with a spot of fear in his eyes.

"You're going out tomorrow, Three-fifty-four. Didn't you know? Oh, you poor devil!"

That last was because Thomas Masterick had trembled a little, grinned a little, and slid down to the floor with the mutton broth spreading all over his chest.

"My Gawd!" said the warder in the mess-room half an hour later. "Now what the devil was that Number Three-fifty-four living for? Eh? What was he looking forward to? He wasn't even keeping tally of his time. He's the first one I've ever known who couldn't tell you to a second how many *hours* he still had to do — at any time of the day or night."

"Well, you see," Thomas Masterick was informing his basin at that moment, "when I was a Feast and Thanksgiving down there by the doctor's

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shop, I had it all written up in the whitewash. Got a splinter off the floor boards, I did. And scratched 'em all up in the whitewash. All in bundles of ten. And I scratched one out at each breakfast. Five thousand four hundred and eighty days. That's what they give you for a lifer. And I had 'em all written up.

"The first time I lost count was years and years ago. While we were out in the exercise the maintenance party came round and put fresh whitewash up in the cells. And when I tried to think down to how many I'd done and how many I still had to do, I got a dizzy. And then, just when I had it nearly all put to rights again by licking off a lot of the new whitewash, they went and changed my cell and made me an Ember Day."

When the chaplain came he found Masterick very quiet and subdued.

"How are you, Number Three-fifty-four?" he asked with kindly austerity. "Well, I hope? — and prepared for your big adventure tomorrow? I really and sincerely trust we shall never see you again."

Masterick turned his eyes to the window-patch.

"Well, sir, that all depends on how *They* look at it," he said, a little distantly. "I never quite know what They're going to do with me next. You never ought to have seen me to start with. Not really. Because I never killed Fred Smith. But you know that, don't you. I told you."

"Yes; but I want to know what you are going to do. I can probably help you with your arrangements and help you to get settled down again. Have you any people living?"

"That I can't say, sir. You see, I've been here a tidy long while. And most likely all the people I used to know have died. Perhaps even Fred Smith has died too. A tidy long while I've been here. There's been a war finished and done with since I've been here. And you see that little flag-pole against my bit of window? Well, I always thought that was a flag-pole from the day it first went up, five months back. But that ain't a flag-pole. It's a wireless. So Southampton Jack tells me. I'll have to step very quiet till I pick up that lot of ropes outside again."

"Yes, quite. H'm! A great pity you haven't somewhere definite to go — something definite to do. Perhaps I may be able to exert ——"

"Oh, I've got something definite to do all right, sir."

"Oh, you have. Oh, well, of course, that's splendid. Regular employment, is it?"

"Pretty regular, maybe. I want to take the mike out of that cocksure crowd in the court. Because, you see, sir, I never killed Fred Smith."

The chaplain, who had heard that curiously uncomplaining fact reiterated with such steady persistence that he had almost come to believe it himself, made a mental note that Thomas Masterick was a case which would have to be watched pretty closely when he got clear of the prison.

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But he needn't have worried. The authorities admitted two months later that their suspicions about Masterick were groundless, and They called off the System. He had hoarded no dark animosity against those connected with his trial — a trial which, except for the fact that Thomas Masterick did not kill Fred Smith, was perfectly honest and fair. In fact, he made what They called "quite a good recovery." He picked into the old ruts with deliberate, if painful, endeavor. He got a job down about the dōcks and set about his task of climbing back into civilianism again with calm stolidity. In his case They did not fear for the recidivist.

And yet, a month after that, They freely admitted that it would have been far better for Them and for the pomp and vanity of all the legal world if Thomas Masterick had gone straight out, bought a gun, and kicked up ten different hells according to his own half-burned-out lights. For the problem that Thomas Masterick flung at Them with cold and calculated deliberation, when the time was ripe, shook the law-officers of the Crown to their fingertips. He knocked the Law clean out. He left it flat and gasping. He sent every legal mind in the country hectically scampering through old and ancient tomes for light and guidance. But there was no light and guidance. Thomas Masterick had floored Them utterly and completely, ludicrously and horribly.

For, three months after his release from prison, and quite by accident, he met the long, lanky devil in the black gown. Counsel for the Crown was also wearing a Knighthood and a K.C. Thomas Masterick was not to know that. Not that it would have mattered to that numb, pulseless soul, even if he had known it.

It was by the "Griffin," where Fleet Street melts into the Strand, and he walked up to him, and he said:

"Hey, mister — you know all that lot of stuff you said about me?"

The K.C. looked down at him shrewdly, and paused for a moment.

"No," he said evenly. "I don't think I do."

"Yes, you remember — that lot of stuff you said about me in the court. To the Judge."

The K.C.'s eyes contracted ever so slightly. Somewhere, in the back blocks of memory, came a tiny, fleeting picture — a glimpse.

"Oh, yes — I believe I do," he said. "Let me see, now — er — wasn't it — er ——"

"Yes, mister; that's what it was. And it was all wrong. All the whole lot of it. I said so at the time, didn't I? And I'm saying so again. I never killed Fred Smith. Not in spite of all what you said. Honest I didn't. And one of these days I'll prove it to you. I'll give you the surprise of your life. And the surprise of everybody else's life who was in that court."

The K.C. drew in a long breath, slowly.

"Ye gods!" he breathed, almost too low to be heard. "So you — you have only just come out, have you?"

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"Yes, mister. A couple of months ago."

"Are you working? I mean, have you got anything to do?"

"Yes, mister. Got a regular job. Wapping to Covent Garden. I'm often along here."

"That's a good man." The K.C. slipped a fiver into his hand. "Get yourself a nice new Sunday suit," he said, with a pat on his shoulder.

"Thank you very much, mister." Thomas Masterick pocketed the fiver and hung around. After a moment he said: "Could you — would you give me a word of advice, too, sir?"

"Certainly, certainly. What's the trouble?"

"Well, supposing I ever found that Fred Smith you said I killed. See, just supposing. How would I have to go about it?"

The K.C. whistled under his breath. "Well!" he said, "that would be a poser. Perhaps the best thing you could do would be to come along and see me — here in my chambers. Any of the bobbies here will show you — just here in the Inner Temple."

"Because down in my lodging-house there's a White Star man says he's seen Fred Smith — that's since you said I killed him. It was in 'Frisco, he said, and Fred was running grain in the hog-backs. Got tired o' sail, he did."

"Well, look here, old man, if ever you do manage to get hold of him, you come along and see me. I'll do all I can to help you."

"I wouldn't half be able to take the mike out of that cocky lot of devils, wouldn't I?"

"You would what?"

"Prove 'em a lot of unholy liars."

"You certainly would."

The K.C. nodded genially and went off with a little pity and a lot of amusement in his heart. He was a good soul in his way, was the K.C., but the acid of the Law ran tart in his veins. His perceptions were too subservient to the dictates of logic.

But it happened that he heard from Thomas Masterick again. On a most propitious day, too. The K.C. was lunching a few legal friends in his chambers. There were three other K.C.'s, a former chancellor, and two judges of the High Court among them.

The K.C.'s secretary entered and slipped behind his chair. "There's a very persistent fellow outside, sir — a man who calls himself Thomas Masterick. He says you wouldn't turn him away for anything. That it's very important, sir. And that he's got Fred Smith with him!"

"Good God!" said the K.C., swinging round. "Here? He's got Smith here?"

"There is another man with him, sir, yes — frightened-looking man."

"Goodness gracious me!" The K.C. turned to his lunch-party with wild excitement in his eyes.

"Well, if that isn't the most amazing thing!" he cried. "Listen here, you fellows. I've got the most unique course just coming in you've ever sampled in your lives. This is a lunch

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you'll remember and talk about for years. A real tit-bit. Do you — do you remember that dock murder fifteen years or so ago? Feller named Masterick killed a chap called Fred Smith. I was conducting for the Crown. You, Rumbold, you were Judge at the time. He got the black cap — obvious from the first; but the Home Sec. commuted. That, too, was obvious. He ——"

Rumbold nodded and the others all intimated memory of the case.

"Well, Masterick is here and — *Smith is here!*" cut in the K.C. with a rush. In a few words he outlined the history of his last meeting with Thomas Masterick in Fleet Street.

"Show them in, Plender," he said. And the two men came in — Masterick calm and a little bit suspicious; Fred Smith openly scared.

"Who's all this lot?" demanded Masterick, nodding once at the guests.

"Friends of mine, old chap. Friends who are, I am sure, quite as eager to hear you and help you as I am myself. I doubt if any man in the world ever had such an array of legal talent — ha, ha, that's one for you, Rumbold — to help him as you have now."

"I don't want any help," said Masterick flatly. He dragged Smith farther into the room. "I've had a hell of a hunt to find him," he announced. "And when I did find him he wouldn't come along — not till I told him about you, mister. I ain't got much to say — I'm afraid I've got a dizzy coming on; that's what comes of trying to think too hard. But the way I look at it is this. You were a cocksure crowd of devils in that court, weren't you? Wouldn't listen to reason, no ways. I told you a hundred times I never killed Fred Smith, but you wouldn't have it; you was that cocky about it. You lagged me for fifteen years for murdering that swipe there. And I hadn't done it. But I've done the punishment for it, blast you! And now" — he suddenly pulled out a gun and shot Fred Smith clean through the heart where he stood — "*now I've done the murder for which I've already been punished,*" he thundered. "And what the hell are you going to do about it?"

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SPEAKING OF CRIME

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The Smiling Englishman

IT IS a prime article of what Mencken and Nathan used to call The American Credo that a sense of humor (pron. *sensayuma*) is the exclusive prerogative of Homo americanus, and that its absence, though noticeable in all foreigners, is most obvious in our English cousins.

All True Believers in that article are advised to read no further in this essay; for it is the belief of this department that certain modern English novelists have discovered how to write the truly humorous mystery novel, not by dressing up a routine whodunit with wisecracks nor by abandoning the whodunit for a wild farce with a corpse or two thrown in, but by establishing the strict, rational, suspenseful detective plot in the midst of a fantastic and wonderful world of the imagination.

The later novels of Michael Innes have displayed this skill at its most entrancing; and THE CASE OF THE JOURNEYING BOY (Dodd, Mead) is one of the finest phantasmagorias in the Innes collection. The England and Ireland in which it is set bear only sufficient resemblance to reality to heighten for the reader the ludicrous and disquieting elements in that reality; and the vaulting imagination, the tongue-in-cheek elaborateness of style, the intricacy of melodramatic plot-counter-plot will carry you through one of the longest mystery novels since Wilkie Collins without wanting to skip one sesquipedalian word.

An equally delightful specimen is Edmund Crispin's BURIED FOR PLEASURE (Lippincott). Mr. Crispin, improving with every book, has by now learned precisely how to blend farce, satire, and detection into a just and joyous whole; and his latest offers us such treasures as an authentic unrationalized poltergeist and the spectacle of Gervase Fen as a candidate for Parliament.

Crispin's political satire is so astute and acute (the campaign speeches might have been written by a malicious tape-recorder) as to make one regret that the American political scene has never received comparable treatment in a mystery story. To be sure, politics and letters go together in the British tradition; Edward Percy, co-author of such masterly murder plays as LADIES IN RETIREMENT and SUSPECT, is a Member of Parliament, as is Sir A. P. Herbert, whose one murder novel is unfortunately not one of his masterpieces.

But American mystery novelists go in for politics too, away from their

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typewriters. Jack Iams ran for Borough Council in New York last fall; Veronica Parker Johns is a committeewoman of her party; Jean Leslie helped draft the Santa Monica city charter and was then elected to the Board of Education. Others know politics well through their families. John Dickson Carr's father was a congressman (Wooda N. Carr of Pennsylvania), and Helen Knowland's husband is a Senator (William Knowland of California). Please, won't one of you do the American equivalent of Gervase Fen's campaign?

If party politics are neglected, however, we do still have the trend toward political content mentioned in my last column. Murray Morgan's THE VIEWLESS WINDS (Dutton) examines the effect of murder on labor-management problems in the Pacific Northwest and makes a singularly sharp and forceful piece of story-telling out of it. Fred Malina's SOME LIKE 'EM SHOT (Mill-Morrow) is unusual and possibly significant in that it takes a socially powerful theme (the framing of a Negro for murder in the South) and uses it simply as the springboard for a better-than-average fast-action story. Have we really reached the point where we can take a liberal viewpoint for granted without argument or preaching? Jim Thompson's NOTHING MORE THAN MURDER (Harper) has, possibly inadvertently, marked social value in its bitter picture of the dog-eat-dog "free enterprise" of film exhibitors — in addition to which it's a good hard, sexy, Cain-ish study in human evil. And all this is balanced by the manifesto from the extreme Right on the Privileges of Great Wealth in Barber and Schabelitz's THE DEED IS DRAWN (Scribner's).

To return from this political digression to the subject of the British mystery novel: The Innes and the Crispin markedly outshine all other recent imports; but Nicholas Blake's HEAD OF A TRAVELER (Harper) and Ngaio Marsh's A WREATH FOR RIVERA (Little, Brown) are suave survivals of the British Golden Age of the 30's. If neither is up to its author's best, it's for oddly opposite reasons: Marsh knows so little about her principal subject, hot jazz, that even such a longhair as this columnist feels the wrongness of her allusions, while Blake knows so much about his theme, the nature of poetic creation, that he never quite conveys it convincingly to the reader.

Margery Allingham contributes two slick magazine novelettes, somewhat below her standards of subtlety, in DEADLY DUO (Crime Club). E. C. R. Lorac handles an unworthy plot with great finesse in PLACE FOR A POISONER (Crime Club). Christopher Bush is routinely agreeable in THE CASE OF THE PLATINUM BLONDE (Macmillan). And two of my most admired favorites, George Bellairs in THE CASE OF THE FAMISHED PARSON (Macmillan) and Anthony Gilbert in THE INNOCENT BOTTLE (Barnes), are, it breaks my heart to say, unbearably dull.

The high point of recent American

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books was, for me, John Macdonald's THE MOVING TARGET (Knopf). Obviously the pseudonym of a highly experienced writer, Macdonald has brought a fresh warmth and humanity to the hardboiled novel just when it stood most in danger of becoming a routine hack form. You can put this on your Hammett-Chandler shelf; it won't be at all out of place in that company.

An unusually sound first is E. Lee Waddell's MURDER AT DRAKE'S ANCHORAGE (Dutton), whose technical flaws don't obscure its fine perception of character and setting (a private school on the Northern California coast). Doris Miles Disney's FAMILY SKELETON (Crime Club) is an oddly effective bit of middle-class irony not quite like any other murder novel I know. David Dodge, in PLUNDER OF THE SUN (Random), drops mystery to write a story of buried treasure which, for all the adult intelligence of its writing, will enthrall the fourteen-year-old in you. Leslie Ford, in DATE WITH DEATH (Scribner's), abandons the courtship of Grace Latham for an unpretentious, well-plotted story of Annapolis which I like better than anything she's done since she stopped being David Frome. And Marion Bramhall's MURDER IS CONTAGIOUS (Crime Club) is one of the most appealing of recent mysteries, a story of veterans in college written with a rare feeling for human inconsistency and a warm understanding.

Those are the best of the American crop. The rest includes standard performances from Mignon G. Eberhart in HOUSE OF STORM (Random), Frank Gruber in THE LEATHER DUKE (Rinehart), and Kathleen Moore Knight in DYING ECHO (Crime Club); slightly to very substandard from George Harmon Coxe in LADY KILLER (Knopf), Christopher Hale in HE'S LATE THIS MORNING (Crime Club), Erle Stanley Gardner in THE CASE OF THE CAUTIOUS COQUETTE (Morrow), and Craig Rice in INNOCENT BYSTANDER (Simon & Schuster); and a certain improvement over past performance from Rae Foley in GIRL FROM NOWHERE (Dodd, Mead) and Amelia Reynolds Long in THE CORPSE CAME BACK (Phoenix).

It's regrettable that 1949 has so far witnessed the publication of only one volume of short stories, William Irish's THE BLUE RIBBON (Lippincott), and that a mixed lot ranging from the supernatural to pure sentimental emotionalism. But the five crime stories included bear the authentic Irish/Woolrich stamp so unmistakably that no seeker for suspense can afford to overlook the volume.

Baker Street Department: George Bagby's terse and satisfactory DROP DEAD (Crime Club) features 11-year-old Richard Holmes, who claims that he inherits his detective ability from his grandfather. . . . The City Planning Commission of Grants Pass, Oregon, approved realtor G. C. Sherlock's request for the inevitable name for his new subdivision: Sherlock Homes. The main street is to be christened Watson Drive.

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The late Meredith Nicholson led a double life: he was a famous American novelist of his day, and he was a well-known American diplomat, serving his country for many years as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Paraguay and Nicaragua. He was a tall, strapping Hoosier gentleman, and those who knew him were impressed by his peaceful, leisurely manner.

But despite his success as a diplomat, his heart belonged to the typewriter. He had his first literary work published at the age of sixteen — poems printed in local weekly newspapers; shortly after, he won a $5 prize from the Chicago "Tribune" — for a short story. And although his career before diplomacy included such diverse occupations as drug clerk, printer, court reporter, and auditor, he never stopped writing. His popularity stemmed not from his early realistic stories but from a series of American picaresque novels — remember, it was the era of high romance, the "good old days" of Graustark and Zenda. Mr. Nicholson's THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND CANDLES *(still a most appealing title!) was fresh and charming and exciting — in a genteel way. The author once explained that "while I have never reddened my hands with blood or sought buried treasure or indulged in kidnaping, I find the contemplation of such experiences highly edifying." That sense of vicarious thrill crept into his work — in a genteel way.*

We now bring you one of Meredith Nicholson's detective short stories — oh, yes, he wrote detective stories too (who didn't? who doesn't?). "The Third Man" was first published more than a quarter of a century ago, yet it is an interesting story to read today. In style, it barely shows the passage of the years; in substance, although it fails to measure up to contemporary ingenuity, it has its fascinating points. Here, for example, is the psychological detective story of early vintage in which the author attempts to translate the stream-of-subconsciousness into a physical *clue; here, undeniably, is a preoccupation with people rather than with plot; and here, too, is the glorification of the amateur — for the detective in this tale was none other than the Governor of Indiana.*

THE THIRD MAN

by MEREDITH NICHOLSON

WHEN Webster G. Burgess asked ten of his cronies to dine with him at the University Club on a night in January, they assumed that the president of the White River National had been indulging in another

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adventure which he wished to tell them about.

In spite of their constant predictions that if he didn't stop hiding crooks in his house and playing tricks on the Police Department he would ultimately find himself in jail, Mr. Burgess continued to find amusement in frequent dallyings with gentlemen of the underworld. In a town of approximately three hundred thousand people a banker is expected to go to church on Sundays and otherwise conduct himself as a decent, orderly, and law-abiding citizen, but the president of the White River National did not see things in that light. As a member of the Board of Directors of the Released Prisoner's Aid Society he was always ready with the excuse that his heart was deeply moved by the misfortunes of those who keep to the dark side of the street, and that sincere philanthropy covered all his sins in their behalf.

When his friends met at the club and found Governor Eastman one of the dinner party, they resented the presence of that dignitary as likely to impose restraints upon Burgess, who, for all his jauntiness, was not wholly without discretion. But the governor was a good fellow, as they all knew, and a story-teller of wide reputation. Moreover, he was taking his job seriously and, being practical men, they liked this about him. It was said that no governor since Civil War times had spent so many hours at his desk or had shown the same zeal and capacity for gathering information at first hand touching all departments of the State government. Eastman, as the country knows, is an independent character, and it was this quality, shown first as a prosecuting attorney, that had attracted attention and landed him in the seat of the Hoosier governors.

"I suppose," remarked Kemp as they sat down, "that these tablets are scattered around the table so we can make notes of the clever things that will be said here tonight. It's a good idea and gives me a chance to steal some of your stories, governor."

A scratch pad with pencil attached had been placed at each plate, and the diners spent several minutes in chaffing Burgess as to the purpose of this unusual table decoration.

"I guess," said Goring, "that Web is going to ask us to write limericks for a prize and that the governor is here to judge the contest. Indoor winter sports don't appeal to me; I pass."

"I'm going to write notes to the House Committee on mine," said Fanning. "The food in this club is not what it used to be, and it's about time somebody kicked."

"As I've frequently told you," remarked Burgess, smiling upon them from the head of the table, "you fellows have no imagination. You'd never guess what those tablets are for, and maybe I'll never tell you."

"Nothing is so innocent as a piece of white paper," said the governor, eyeing his tablet. "We'd better be careful not to jot down anything that

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might fly up and hit us afterward. For all we know, it may be a scheme to get our signatures for Burgess to stick on notes without relief from valuation or appraisement laws. It's about time for another Bohemian oats swindle, and our friend Burgess may expect to work us for the price of the dinner."

"Web's bound to go to jail some day," remarked Ramsay, the surgeon, "and he'd better do it while you're in office, governor. You may not know that he's hand in glove with all the criminals in the country: he quit poker so he could give all his time to playing with crooks."

"The warden of the penitentiary has warned me against him," replied the governor easily. "Burgess has a man at the gate to meet convicts as they emerge, and all the really bad ones are sent down here for Burgess to put up at this club."

"I never did that but once," Burgess protested, "and that was only because my mother-in-law was visiting me and I was afraid she wouldn't stand for a burglar as a fellow guest. My wife's got used to 'em. But the joke of putting that chap up here at the club isn't on me, but on Ramsay and Colton. They had luncheon with him one day and thanked me afterward for introducing them to so interesting a man. I told them he was a manufacturer from St. Louis, and they swallowed it whole. Pettit was the name, but he has a string of aliases as long as this table, and there's not a rogues' gallery in the country where he isn't indexed. You remember, Colton, he talked a good deal of his travels, and he could do so honestly, as he'd cracked safes all the way from Boston to Seattle."

Ramsay and Colton protested that this could not be so; that the man they had luncheon with was a shoe manufacturer and had talked of his business as only an expert could.

The governor and Burgess exchanged glances, and both laughed.

"He knew the shoe business all right enough," said Burgess, "for he learned it in the penitentiary and proved so efficient that they made him foreman of the shop!"

"I suppose," said Kemp, "that you've got another crook coming to take that vacant chair. You'd better tell us about him so we won't commit any social errors."

At the governor's right there was an empty place, and Burgess remarked carelessly that they were shy a man, but that he would turn up later.

"I've asked Tate, a banker at Loringsburg, to join us and he'll be along after a while. Any of you know Tate? One of our scouts recently persuaded him to transfer his account to us, and as this is the first time he's been in town since the change I thought it only decent to show him some attention. We're both directors in a company that's trying to develop a tile factory in his town, so you needn't be afraid I'm going to put anything over on you. Tate's attending a meeting tonight. He promised to be here before we got down to the coffee."

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As the dinner progressed the governor was encouraged to tell stories, and acceded good-naturedly by recounting some amusing things that had happened in the course of his official duties.

"But it isn't all so funny," he said gravely after keeping them in a roar for half an hour. "In a state as big as this a good many disagreeable things happen, and people come to me every day with heartbreaking stories. There's nothing that causes me more anxiety than the appeals for pardon; if the pardoning power were taken away from me, I'd be a much happier man. The Board of Pardons winnows out the cases, but even at that there's enough to keep me uncomfortable. It isn't the pleasantest feeling in the world that as you go to bed at night somebody may be suffering punishment unjustly, and that it's up to you to find it out. When a woman comes in backed by a child or two and cries all over your office about her husband who's doing time and tells you he wasn't guilty, it doesn't cheer you much; not by a jugful! Wives, mothers, and sisters: the wives shed more tears, the sisters put up the best argument, but the mothers give you more sleepless nights."

"If it were up to me," commented Burgess, "I'm afraid I'd turn 'em all out!"

"You would," chorused the table derisively, "and when you'd emptied the penitentiaries you'd burn 'em down!"

"Of course there's bound to be cases of flagrant injustice," suggested Kemp. "And the feelings of a man who is locked up for a crime he never committed must be horrible. We hear now and then of such cases and it always shakes my faith in the law."

"The law does the best it can," replied the governor a little defensively, "but, as you say, mistakes do occur. The old saying that murder will out is no good; we can all remember cases where the truth was never known. Mistakes occur constantly, and it's the fear of not rectifying them that's making a nervous wreck of me. I have in my pocket now a blank pardon that I meant to sign before I left my office, but I couldn't quite bring myself to the point. The Pardon Board has made the recommendation, not on the grounds of injustice — more, I'm afraid, out of sympathy than anything else — and we have to be careful of our sympathies in these matters. And here again there's a wife to reckon with. She's been at my office nearly every day for a year, and she's gone to my wife repeatedly to enlist her support. And it's largely through Mrs. Eastman's insistence that I've spent many weeks studying the case. It's a murder: what appeared to be a heartless cold-blooded assassination. And some of you may recall it — the Avery case, seven years ago, in Salem County."

Half the men had never heard of it and the others recalled it only vaguely.

"It was an interesting case," Burgess remarked, wishing to draw the

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governor out. "George Avery was a man of some importance down there and stood high in the community. He owned a quarry almost eleven miles from Torrenceville and maintained a bungalow on the quarry land where he used to entertain his friends with quail hunting and perhaps now and then a poker party. He killed a man named Reynolds who was his guest. As I remember, there seemed to be no great mystery about it, and Avery's defense was a mere disavowal and a flourish of character witnesses."

"For all anybody ever knew, it was a plain case, as Burgess says," the governor began. "Avery and Reynolds were business acquaintances and Avery had invited Reynolds down there to discuss the merging of their quarry interests. Reynolds was found dead a little way from the bungalow by some of the quarry laborers. He had been beaten on the head with a club in the most barbarous fashion. Reynolds's overcoat was torn off and the buttons ripped from his waistcoat, pointing to a fierce struggle before his assailant got him down and pounded the life out of him. The purpose was clearly not robbery, as Reynolds had a considerable sum of money on his person that was left untouched. When the men who found the body went to rouse Avery, he collapsed when told that Reynolds was dead. In fact, he lay in a stupor for a week, and they could get nothing out of him. Tracks? No; it was a cold December night and the ground was frozen.

"Reynolds had meant to take a midnight train for Chicago, and Avery had wired for special orders to stop at the quarry station, to save Reynolds the trouble of driving into Torrenceville. One might have supposed that Avery would accompany his visitor to the station, particularly as it was not a regular stop for night trains and the way across the fields was a little rough. I've personally been over all the ground. There are many difficult and inexplicable things about the case, the absence of motive being one of them. The State asserted business jealousy and substantiated it to a certain extent, and the fact that Avery had taken the initiative in the matter of combining their quarry interests and might have used undue pressure on Reynolds to force him into the deal is to be considered."

The governor lapsed into silence, seemingly lost in reverie. With his right hand he was scribbling idly on the tablet that lay by his plate. The others, having settled themselves comfortably in their chairs, hoping to hear more of the murder, were disappointed when he ceased speaking. Burgess's usual calm, assured air deserted him. He seemed unwontedly restless, and they saw him glance furtively at his watch.

"Please, governor, won't you go on with the story?" pleaded Colton. "You know that nothing that's said at one of Web's parties ever goes out of the room."

"That," laughed the governor, "is probably unfortunate, as most of his

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stories ought to go to the grand jury. But if I may talk here into the private ear of you gentlemen I will go on a little further. I've got to make up my mind in the next hour or two about this case, and it may help me to reach a conclusion to think aloud about it."

"You needn't be afraid of us," said Burgess encouragingly. "We've been meeting here — about the same crowd — once a month for five years, and nobody has ever blabbed anything."

"All right; we'll go a bit further. Avery's stubborn silence was a contributing factor in his prompt conviction. A college graduate, a high-strung, nervous man, hard-working and tremendously ambitious; successful, reasonably prosperous, happy in his marriage, and with every reason for living straight: there you have George Avery as I make him out to have been when this calamity befell him. There was just one lapse, one error, in his life, but that didn't figure in the case, and I won't speak of it now. His conduct from the moment of his arrest, a week following the murder, and only after every other possible clue had been exhausted by the local authorities, was that of a man mutely resigned to his fate. I find from the records that he remained at the bungalow in care of a physician, utterly dazed, it seemed, by the thing he had done, until a warrant was issued and he was put in jail. He's been a prisoner ever since, and his silence has been unbroken to this day. His wife assures me that he never, not even to her, said one word about the case more than to declare his innocence. I've seen him at the penitentiary on two occasions, but could get nothing out of him. In fact, I exhausted any ingenuity I may have in attempting to surprise him into some admission that would give me ground for pardoning him, but without learning anything that was not in the State's case. They're using him as a bookkeeper, and he's made a fine record: a model convict. The long confinement has told seriously on his health, which is the burden of his wife's plea for his release, but he wouldn't even discuss that.

"There was no one else at the bungalow on the night of the murder," the governor continued. "It was Avery's habit to get his meals at the house of the quarry superintendent, about five hundred yards away, and the superintendent's wife cared for the bungalow, but the men I've had at work couldn't find anything in that to hang a clue on. You see, gentlemen, after seven years it's not easy to work up a case, but two expert detectives that I employed privately to make some investigations along lines I suggested have been of great assistance. Failing to catch the scent where the trail started, I set them to work backward from a point utterly remote from the scene. It was a guess, and ordinarily it would have failed, but in this case it has brought results that are all but convincing."

The tablets and pencils that had been distributed along the table had not been neglected. The guests, with-

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out exception, had been drawing or scribbling; Colton had amused himself by sketching the governor's profile. Burgess seemed not to be giving his undivided attention to the governor's review of the case. He continued to fidget, and his eyes swept the table with veiled amusement. Then he tapped a bell and a waiter appeared.

"Pardon me a moment, governor, till the cigars are passed again."

In his round with the cigar tray the waiter, evidently by prearrangement, collected the tablets and laid them in front of Burgess.

"Changed your mind about the limerick contest, Web?" asked someone.

"Not at all," said Burgess carelessly; "the tablets have fulfilled their purpose. It was only a silly idea of mine anyhow." They noticed, however, that a tablet was left at the still vacant place that awaited the belated guest, and they wondered at this, surmising that Burgess had planned the dinner carefully and that the governor's discussion of the Avery case was by connivance with their host. With a quickening of interest they drew their chairs closer to the table.

"The prosecuting attorney who represented the State in the trial is now a judge of the Circuit Court," the governor resumed when the door closed upon the waiter. "I have had many talks with him about this case. He confesses that there are things about it that still puzzle him. The evidence was purely circumstantial, as I have already indicated; but circumstantial evidence, as Thoreau once remarked, may be very convincing, as when you find a trout in the milk! But when two men have spent a day together in the house of one of them, and the other is found dead in a lonely place not far away, and suspicion attaches to no one but the survivor — not even the tramp who usually figures in such speculations — a jury of twelve farmers may be pardoned for taking the State's view of the matter."

"The motive you spoke of, business jealousy, doesn't seem quite adequate unless it could be established that they had quarreled and that there was a clear showing of enmity," suggested Fullerton, the lawyer.

"You are quite right, and the man who prosecuted Avery admits it," the governor answered.

"There may have been a third man in the affair," suggested Ramsey, "and I suppose the cynical must have suggested the usual woman in the case."

"I daresay those possibilities were thrashed out at the time," the governor replied; "but the only woman in this case is Avery's wife, and she and Reynolds had never met. I have found nothing to sustain any suspicion that there was a woman in the case. Avery's ostensible purpose in asking Reynolds to visit him at that out-of-the-way place was merely that they could discuss the combination of their quarry interests privately, and close to Avery's plant. It seems that

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Avery had undertaken the organization of a big company to take over a number of quarries whose product was similar, and that he wished to confer secretly with Reynolds to secure his sanction to a selling agreement before the others he wanted to get into the combination heard of it. That, of course, is perfectly plausible; I could make a good argument justifying that. Reynolds, like many small capitalists in country towns, had a number of irons in the fire and had done some promoting on his own hook. All the financial genius and all the financial crookedness aren't confined to Wall Street, though I forget that sometimes when I'm on the stump! I'm disposed to think from what I've learned of both of them that Avery wasn't likely to put anything over on Reynolds, who was no child in business matters. And there was nothing to show that Avery had got him down there for any other purpose than to effect a merger of quarry interests for their mutual benefit."

"There probably were papers to substantiate that," suggested Fullerton; "correspondence and that sort of thing."

"Certainly; I have gone into that," the governor replied. "All the papers remain in the office of the prosecuting attorney, and I have examined them carefully. Now, if Avery had been able to throw suspicion on someone else you'd think he'd have done so. And if there had been a third person at the bungalow that night, you'd imagine that Avery would have said so; it's not in human nature for one man to take the blame for another's crime, and yet we do hear of such things, and I have read novels and seen plays built upon that idea. But here is Avery with fifteen years more to serve, and, if he's been bearing the burden and suffering the penalty of another's sin, I must say that he's taking it all in an amazing spirit of self-sacrifice."

"Of course," said Fullerton, "Reynolds may have had an enemy who followed him there and lay in wait for him. Or Avery may have connived at the crime without being really the assailant. That is conceivable."

"We'll change the subject for a moment," said the governor, "and return to our muttons later."

He spoke in a low tone to Burgess, who looked at his watch and answered audibly:

"We have half an hour more."

The governor nodded and with a whimsical smile began turning over the tablets.

"These pads were placed before you for a purpose which I will now explain. I apologize for taking advantage of you, but you will pardon me, I'm sure, when I tell you my reason. I've dipped into psychology lately with a view to learning something of the mind's eccentricities. We all do things constantly without conscious effort, as you know; we perform acts automatically without the slightest idea that we are doing them. At meetings of our State boards I've noticed that nobody ever uses the pads that are al-

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ways provided except to scribble on. Many people have that habit of scribbling on anything that's handy. Hotel keepers knowing this, provide pads of paper ostensibly for memoranda that guests may want to make while at the telephone, but really to keep them from defacing the wall. Left alone with pencil and paper, most of us will scribble something or draw meaningless figures.

"Sometimes it's indicative of a deliberate turn of mind; again it's sheer nervousness. After I had discussed this with a well-known psychologist I began watching myself and found that I made a succession of figure eights looped together in a certain way — I've been doing it here!

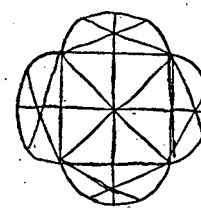
"And now," he went on with a chuckle, "you gentlemen have been indulging this same propensity as you listened to me. I find on one pad the word, Napoleon written twenty times with a lot of flourishes; another has traced a dozen profiles of a man with a bulbous nose: it is the same gentleman, I find, who honored me by drawing me with a triple chin — for which I thank him. And here's what looks like a dog kennel repeated down the sheet. Still another has sketched the American flag all over the page. If the patriotic gentleman who drew the flag will make himself known, I should like to ask him whether he's conscious of having done that before?"

"I'm guilty, governor," Fullerton responded. "I believe it is a habit of mine. I've caught myself doing it scores of times."

"I'm responsible for the man with the fat nose," confessed Colton; "I've been drawing him for years without ever improving my draftsmanship."

"That will do," said the governor, glancing at the door. "We won't take time to speak of the others, though you may be relieved to know that I haven't got any evidence against you. Burgess, please get these works of art out of the room. We'll go back to the Avery case. In going over the papers I found that the prosecuting attorney in his search of the bungalow the morning after the murder found a number of pieces of paper that bore an odd, irregular sort of sketch. I'm going to pass one of them round, but please send it back to me immediately."

He produced a sheet of letter paper that bore traces of hasty crumpling, but it had been smoothed out again, and held it up. It bore the lithographed name of the Avery Quarry Company. On it was drawn this device:



"Please note," said the governor as the paper passed from hand to hand, "that the same device is traced there five times, sometimes more irregularly than others, but the general form

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is the same. Now, in the fireplace of the bungalow living-room they found this and three other sheets of the same stationery that bore this same figure. It seems a fair assumption that someone sitting at a table had amused himself by sketching these outlines and then, when he had filled the sheet, tore it off and threw it into the fireplace, wholly unconscious of what he was doing. The prosecutor attached no importance to these sheets, and it was only by chance that they were stuck away in the file box with the other documents in the case."

"Then you suspect that there was a third man in the bungalow that night?" Ramsay asked.

The governor nodded gravely.

"Yes; I have quite a bit of proof, in fact. I have even had the wastebasket of the suspect examined for a considerable period. Knowing Burgess's interest in such matters, I have been using him to get me certain information I very much wanted. And our friend is a very successful person! I wanted to see the man I have in mind and study him a little when he was off-guard, and Burgess has arranged that for me, though he had to go into the tile business to do it! As you can readily see, I could hardly drag him to my office, so this little party was got up to give me a chance to look him over at leisure."

"Tate!" exclaimed several of the men.

"You can see that this is a very delicate matter," said the governor slowly. "Burgess thought it better not to have a smaller party, as Tate, whom I never saw, might think it a frame-up. So you see we are using you as stool-pigeons, so to speak. Burgess vouches for you as men of discretion and tact; and it will be your business to keep Tate amused and his attention away from me while I observe him a little."

"And when I give the signal you're to go into the library and look at picture books," Burgess added.

"That's not fair!" said Fullerton. "We want to see the end of it!"

"I'm so nervous," said Colton, "I'm likely to scream at any minute!"

"Don't do it!" Burgess admonished. "The new House Committee is very touchy about noise in the private dining rooms, and besides I've got a lot of scenery set for the rest of the evening, and I don't want you fellows to spoil it."

"It begins to look," remarked the governor, glancing at his watch, "as though some of our scenery might have got lost."

"He'd hardly bolt," Burgess replied; "he knows of no reason why he should! I told the doorman to send him right up. When he comes there will be no more references to the Avery case: you all understand?"

They murmured their acquiescence, and a solemn hush fell upon them as they turned involuntarily toward the vacant chair.

"This will never do!" exclaimed the governor, who seemed to be the one tranquil person in the room. "We must be telling stories and giving an

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imitation of weary business men having a jolly time. But I'm tired of talking; some of the good story-tellers ought to be stirred up."

With a little prodding Fullerton took the lead, but was able to win only grudging laughter. Colton was trying his hand at diverting them when they were startled by a knock. Burgess was at the door instantly and flung it open.

"Ah, Tate! Come right in; the party hasn't started yet!"

The newcomer was a short, thickset man, clean shaven, with coarse dark hair streaked with gray. The hand he gave the men in succession as they gathered about him for Burgess's introduction was broad and heavy. He offered it limply, with an air of embarrassment.

"Governor Eastman, Mr. Tate; that's your seat by the governor, Tate," said Burgess. "We were just listening to some old stories from some of these fellows, so you haven't missed anything. I hope they didn't need me at that tile meeting; I never attend night meetings: they spoil my sleep, which my doctor says I've got to have."

"Night meetings," said the governor, "always give me a grouch the next morning. A party like this doesn't, of course!"

"Up in the country where I live we still stick to lodge meetings as an excuse when we want a night off," Tate remarked.

They laughed more loudly than was necessary to put him at ease. He refused Burgess's offer of food and drink and when someone started a political discussion they conspired to draw him into it. He was County Chairman of the party not then in power and complained good-naturedly to the governor of the big plurality Eastman had rolled up in the last election. He talked slowly, with a kind of dogged emphasis, and it was evident that politics was a subject to his taste. His brown eyes, they were noting, were curiously large and full, with a bilious tinge in the white. He met a glance steadily with, indeed, an almost disconcerting directness.

Where the governor sat became, by imperceptible degrees, the head of the table as he began seriously and frankly discussing the points of difference between the existing parties. There was nothing to indicate that anything lay behind his talk; to all appearances his auditors were absorbed in what he was saying. Tate had accepted a cigar, which he did not light but kept twisting slowly in his thick fingers.

"We Democrats have had to change our minds about a good many things," the governor was saying. "Of course we're not going back to Jefferson but the world has spun around a good many times since Jefferson's day. What I think we Democrats do and do splendidly is to keep close to the changing current of public opinion; sometimes it seems likely to wash us down, as in the free-silver days; but we give, probably without always realizing it, a chance for the people to express themselves on new questions,

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and if we've stood for some foolish policies at times the country's the better for having passed on them. These great contests clear the air like a storm, and we all go peacefully about our business afterward."

As he continued they were all covertly watching Tate, who dropped his cigar and began playing with the pencil before him, absently winding and unwinding it upon the string that held it to the tablet. They were feigning an absorption in the governor's recital which their quick, nervous glances at Tate's hand belied. Burgess had pushed back his chair to face the governor more comfortably and was tying knots in his napkin.

Now and then Tate nodded solemnly in affirmation of something the governor said, but without lifting his eyes from the pencil. His broad shoulders were bent over the table, and the men about him were reflecting that this was probably an attitude into which his heavy body often relaxed when he was pondering deeply. Then, after looking up to join in a laugh at some indictment of Republicanism expressed in droll terms by the governor, Tate finally drew the tablet closer and, turning his head slightly to one side, drew a straight line. Burgess frowned as several men changed position the better to watch him. The silence deepened, and the governor's voice rose with a slight oratorical ring. Through a half-open window floated the click of billiard balls in the room below. The governor having come down to the Wilson Administration, went back to Cleveland, whom he praised as a great leader and great president. In normal circumstances there would have been interruptions and questions and an occasional jibe; and ordinarily the governor, who was not noted for loquacity, would not have talked twenty minutes at a stretch without giving an opportunity to his companions to break in upon him. He was talking, as they all knew, to give Tate time to draw the odd device which it was his habit to sketch when deeply engrossed.

The pencil continued to move over the paper; and from time to time Tate turned the pad and scrutinized his work critically. The men immediately about him watched his hand, wide-eyed, fascinated. There was something uncanny and unreal in the situation: it was like watching a wild animal approaching a trap wholly unmindful of its danger. The square box which formed the base of the device was traced clearly; the arcs which were its familiar embellishment were carefully added. The governor, having exhausted Cleveland, went back to Jackson, and Tate finished a second drawing, absorbed in his work and rarely lifting his eyes.

Seeing that Tate had tired of this pastime, the governor brought his lecture to an end, exclaiming:

"Great Scott, Burgess! Why haven't you stopped me! I've said enough here to ruin me with my party, and you hadn't the grace to shut me off."

"I'm glad for one," said Tate, pushing back the pad, "that I got in

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in time to hear you; I've never known before that any Democrat could be so broad-minded!"

"The governor loosens up a good deal between campaigns," said Burgess, rising. "And now, let's go into the library where the chairs are easier."

The governor rose with the others, but remained by his chair, talking to Tate, until the room cleared, and then resumed his seat.

"This is perfectly comfortable; let's stay here, Mr. Tate. Burgess, close the door, will you."

Tate hesitated, looked at his watch, and glanced at Burgess, who sat down as though wishing to humor the governor.

"Mr. Tate," said the governor unhurriedly, "if I'm not mistaken, you are George Avery's brother-in-law."

Tate turned quickly, and his eyes widened in surprise.

"Yes," he answered in slow, even tones; "Avery married my sister."

"Mr. Tate, I have in my pocket a pardon all ready to sign, giving Avery his liberty. His case has troubled me a good deal; I don't want to sign this pardon unless I'm reasonably sure of Avery's innocence. If you were in my place, Mr. Tate, would you sign it?"

The color went out of the man's face and his jaw fell; but he recovered himself quickly.

"Of course, governor, it would be a relief to me, to my sister, all of us, if you could see your way to pardoning George. As you know, I've been doing what I could to bring pressure to bear on the Board of Pardons: everything that seemed proper. Of course," he went on ingratiatingly, "we've all felt the disgrace of the thing."

"Mr. Tate," the governor interrupted, "I have reason to believe that there was a third man at Avery's bungalow the night Reynolds was killed. I've been at some pains to satisfy myself of that. Did that ever occur to you as a possibility?"

"I suspected that all along," Tate answered, drawing his handkerchief slowly across his face. "I never could believe George Avery guilty; he wasn't that kind of man!"

"I don't think he was myself," the governor replied. "Now, Mr. Tate, on the night of the murder you were not at home, nor on the next day when your sister called you on the long-distance telephone. You were in Louisville, were you not?"

"Yes, I was in Louisville."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Tate, you were not in Louisville! You were at Avery's bungalow that night, and you left the quarry station on a freight train that was sidetracked on the quarry switch to allow the Chicago train to pass. You rode to Davos, which you reached at two o'clock in the morning. There you registered under a false name at the Gerber House, and went home the next evening pretending to have been at Louisville. You are a bachelor, and live in rooms over your bank, and there was no one to keep tab on your absences but your clerks, who naturally thought nothing of your going to

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Louisville, where business often takes you. When you heard that Reynolds was dead and Avery under suspicion, you answered your sister's summons and hurried to Torrenceville."

"I was in Louisville, I tell you!" Tate uttered the words in convulsive gasps. He brushed the perspiration from his forehead impatiently and half rose.

"Please sit down, Mr. Tate. You had had trouble a little while before that with Reynolds about some stock in a creamery concern that he had promoted. You thought he had tricked you, and very possibly he had. The creamery business had resulted in a bitter hostility between you: it had gone to such an extent that he had refused to see you again to discuss the matter. You brooded over that until you were not quite sane where Reynolds was concerned: I'll give you the benefit of that. You asked your brother-in-law to tell you when Reynolds was going to see him, and he obligingly consented. We will assume that Avery, a good fellow and anxious to aid you, made a meeting possible. Reynolds wasn't to know that you were to be at the bungalow — he wouldn't have gone if he had known it — and Avery risked the success of his own negotiations by introducing you into his house, out of sheer good will and friendship. You sat at a table in the bungalow living-room and discussed the matter. Some of these things I have guessed at; the rest of it ——"

"It's a lie! This was a scheme to get me here: you and Burgess have set this up on me! I tell you I wasn't at the quarry; I never saw Reynolds there that night or any other time. My God, if I had been there — if Avery could have put it on me, would he be doing time for it?"

"Not necessarily, Mr. Tate. Let us go back a little. It had been in your power once to do Avery a great favor, a very great favor. That's true, isn't it?"

Tate stared, clearly surprised, but his quivering lips framed no answer.

"You had known him from boyhood, and shortly after his marriage to your sister it had been in your power to do him a great favor; you had helped him out of a hole and saved the quarry for him. It cost me considerable money to find that out, Mr. Tate, and not a word of help have I had from Avery: be sure of that! He had been guilty of something irregular — in fact, the forging of your name to a note — and you had dealt generously with him, out of your old-time friendship, we will say, or to spare your sister humiliation."

"George was in a corner," said Tate weakly but with manifest relief at the turn of the talk. "He squared it all long ago."

"It's natural, in fact, instinctive, for a man to protect himself, to exhaust all the possibilities of defense when the law lays its hand upon him. Avery did not do so, and his meek submission counted heavily against him. But let us consider that a little. You and Reynolds left the bungalow together,

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probably after the interview had added to your wrath against him, but you wished to renew the talk out of Avery's hearing and volunteered to guide Reynolds to the station where the Chicago train was to stop for him. You didn't go back, Mr. Tate ——"

"Good God, I tell you I wasn't there! I can prove that I was in Louisville; I tell you ——"

"We're coming back to your alibi in a moment," said the governor patiently. "We will assume — merely assume for the moment — that you said you would take the train with Reynolds and ride as far as Ashton, where the Midland crosses and you would get an early morning train home. Avery went to sleep at the bungalow wholly ignorant of what had happened; he was awakened in the morning with news that Reynolds had been killed by blows on the head inflicted near the big derrick where you and Reynolds — I am assuming again — had stopped to argue your grievances. Avery — shocked, dazed, not comprehending his danger — waited: waited for the prompt help he expected from the only living person who knew that he had not left the bungalow. He knew you only as a kind, helpful friend, and I daresay at first he never suspected you. It was the last thing in the world he would have attributed to you, and the possibility of it was slow to enter his anxious, perturbed mind. He had every reason for sitting tight in those first hideous hours, confident that the third man at that bungalow gathering would come forward and establish his innocence with a word. As is the way in such cases, efforts were made to fix guilt upon others; but Avery, your friend, the man you had saved once, in a fine spirit of magnanimity, waited for you to say the word that would clear him. But you never said that word, Mr. Tate. You took advantage of his silence; a silence due, we will say, to shock and horror at the catastrophe and to his reluctance to believe you guilty of so monstrous a crime or capable of allowing him, an innocent man, to suffer the penalty for it."

Tate's big eyes were bent dully upon the governor. He averted his gaze slowly and reached for a glass of water, but his hand shook so that he could not lift it.

"I wasn't there! Why ——" he began with an effort at bravado; but the words choked him and he sat swinging his head from side to side and breathing heavily.

The governor went on in the same low, even tone he had used from the beginning:

"When Avery came to himself and you still were silent, he doubtless saw that, having arranged for you to meet Reynolds at the bungalow — Reynolds, who had been avoiding you — he had put himself in the position of an accessory before the fact and that even if he told the truth about your being there he would only be drawing you into the net without wholly freeing himself. At best it was an ugly business, and being an intelligent man he knew it. I gather that you are a

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secretive man by nature; the people who know you well in your own town say that of you. No one knew that you had gone there and the burden of the whole thing was upon Avery. And your tracks were so completely hidden: you had been at such pains to sneak down there to take advantage of the chance Avery made for you to see Reynolds and have it out with him about the creamery business, that suspicion never attached to you. You knew Avery as a good fellow, a little weak, perhaps, as you learned from that forgery of your name ten years earlier; and it would have been his word against yours. I'll say to you, Mr. Tate, that I've lain awake at nights thinking about this case, and I know of nothing more pitiful, my imagination can conjure nothing more horrible, than the silent suffering of George Avery as he waited for you to come to his rescue, knowing that you alone could save him."

"I didn't do it, I didn't do it!" Tate reiterated in a hoarse whisper that died away with a queer guttural sound in his throat.

"And now about your alibi, Mr. Tate; the alibi that you were never even called on to establish." The governor reached for the tablet and held it before the man's eyes, which focused upon it slowly, uncomprehendingly. "Now," said the governor, "you can hardly deny that you drew that sketch, for I saw you do it with my own eyes. I'm going to ask you, Mr. Tate, whether this drawing isn't also your work?"

He drew out the sheet of paper he had shown the others earlier in the evening and placed it beside the tablet. Tate jumped to his feet, staring wild-eyed. The governor caught his arm and pushed him back into his chair.

"You will see that that is Avery's letter-head that was used in the quarry office. As you talked there with Reynolds that night, you played with a pencil as you did here a little while ago and without realizing it you were creating evidence against yourself that was all I needed to convince me absolutely of your guilt. I have three other sheets of Avery's paper bearing the same figure that you drew that night at the quarry office; and I have others collected in your own office! As you may be aware, the power of habit is very strong. For years, no doubt, your subconsciousness has carried that device, and in moments of deep abstraction with wholly unrelated things your hand has traced it. Even the irregularities in the outline are identical. I ask you again, Mr. Tate, shall I sign the pardon I brought here in my pocket and free George Avery?"

The sweat dripped from Tate's forehead and trickled down his cheeks in little streams that shone in the light. His collar had wilted at the fold, and he ran his finger round his neck to loosen it. Once, twice, he lifted his head defiantly, but, meeting the governor's eyes fixed upon him relentlessly, his gaze wavered and his shoulders drooped lower.

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Burgess had been standing by the window with his back to them. The governor spoke to him, and he nodded and left the room. In a moment he returned with two men and closed the door quickly.

"Hello, warden; sit down a moment, will you?"

The governor turned to a tall, slender man whose intense pallor was heightened by the brightness of his oddly staring blue eyes. He advanced slowly. His manner was that of a blind man moving cautiously in an unfamiliar room. The governor smiled reassuringly into his white, impassive face.

"I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Avery," he said. He rose and took Avery by the hand.

At the name Tate's head went up with a jerk. His chair creaked discordantly as he turned, looked up into the mask-like face behind him, and then the breath went out of him with a sharp, whistling sound as when a man dies, and he lunged forward with his arms flung out upon the table.

The governor's grip tightened upon Avery's hand.

"You needn't be afraid, Avery," he said. "My way of doing this is a little hard, I know, but it seemed the only way. I want you to tell me," he went on slowly, "whether Tate was at the bungalow the night Reynolds was killed. He *was* there, wasn't he?"

Avery wavered, steadied himself with an effort, and slowly shook his head. The governor repeated his question in a tone so low that Burgess and the warden, waiting at the window, barely heard. A third time he asked the question. Avery's mouth opened, but he only wet his lips with a quick, nervous movement of the tongue, and his eyes met the governor's unseeingly.

The governor turned from him slowly, and his left hand fell upon Tate's shoulder.

"If you are not guilty, Tate, now is the time for you to speak. I want you to say so before Avery; that's what I've brought him here for. I don't want to make a mistake. If you say you believe Avery to be guilty, I will not sign his pardon."

He waited, watching Tate's hands as they opened and shut weakly. A sob, deep, hoarse, pitiful, shook his burly form.

The governor sat down, took a bundle of papers from his pocket, slipped one from under the rubber band which snapped back sharply into place. He drew out a pen, tested the point carefully, then, steadying it with his left hand, wrote his name.

"Warden," he said, waving the paper to dry the ink; "thank you for your trouble. You will have to go home alone. Avery is free."

When Burgess appeared at the bank at ten o'clock the next morning he found his friends of the night before in the directors' room waiting for him. They greeted him without their usual chaff, and he merely nodded to all comprehendingly.

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"We don't want to bother you, Web," said Colton, "but I guess we'd all feel better if we knew what happened after we left you last night. I hope you don't mind."

Burgess frowned and shook his head.

"You ought to thank God you didn't have to see the rest of it! I've got a reservation on the Limited tonight: going down to the big city in the hope of getting it out of my mind."

"Well, we know only what the papers printed this morning," said Ramsay; "a very brief paragraph saying that Avery had been pardoned. The papers don't tell the story of his crime as they usually do, and we noticed that they refrained from saying that the pardon was signed at one of your dinner parties."

"I fixed the newspapers at the governor's request. He didn't want any row made about it, and neither did I, for that matter. Avery is at my house. His wife was there waiting for him when I took him home."

"We rather expected that," said Colton, "as we were planted at the library windows when you left the club. But about the other man: that's what's troubling us."

"Um," said Burgess, crossing his legs and clasping his knees. "*That* was the particular hell of it."

"Tate was guilty; we assume that of course," suggested Fullerton. "We all saw him signing his death warrant right there at the table."

"Yes," Burgess replied gravely, "and he virtually admitted it; but if God lets me live I hope never to see anything like that again!"

He jumped down and took a turn across the room.

"And now —— What after that, Web?"

"Well, it won't take long to tell it. After the governor signed the pardon I told the warden to take Avery downstairs and get him a drink: the poor devil was all in. And then Tate came to, blubbering like the vile coward he is, and began pleading for mercy: on his knees, mind you; on his *knees!* God! It was horrible — horrible beyond anything I ever dreamed of — to see him groveling there. I supposed, of course, the governor would turn him over to the police. I was all primed for that, and Tate expected it and bawled like a sick calf. But what he said was — what the governor said was, and he said it the way they say 'dust to dust' over a grave — 'You poor fool, for such beasts as you the commonwealth has no punishment that will lighten the load you've got to carry around with you till you die!' That's all there was of it! That's exactly what he said, and can you beat it? I got a room for Tate at the club, and told one of the waiters to put him to bed."

"But the governor had no right," began Ramsay eagerly; "he had no *right* ——"

"The king can do no wrong! And if you fellows don't mind, the incident is closed, and we'll never speak of it again."

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It should come as no surprise to learn that the man who wrote such witty and satiric lines as

When constabulary duty's to be done
A policeman's lot is not a happy one.
— The Pirates of Penzance
My object all sublime
I shall achieve in time —
To let the punishment fit the crime.
— The Mikado
Things are seldom what they seem,
Skim milk masquerades as cream.
— H. M. S. Pinafore

wrote occasional humorous crime stories as well. The man is, of course, W. S. Gilbert, of the immortal Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration, and his background in literary and real-life crime was more extensive than most people realize. His famous BAB BALLADS *are "clever verses which, in the name of good fun, discoursed amiably on violence and crime"; and did you know that at the age of two, W. S. Gilbert was kidnaped by bandits in Naples and held for ransom?*

The humorous crime story is always a dangerous experiment. When it comes off, especially in the hands of a master, it is "a thing of beauty" and "a joy forever"; but when it fails, it is like a trick cigar — it explodes in your face. Judge for yourself if W. S. Gilbert's "The Burglar's Story" is as comic today as it must have been to readers more than fifty years ago, when it first appeared in print . . .

THE BURGLAR'S STORY

by W. S. GILBERT

WHEN I became eighteen years of age, my father, a distinguished begging-letter impostor, said to me, "Reginald, I think it is time that you began to think about choosing a profession."

These were ominous words. Since I left Eton, nearly a year before, I had spent my time very pleasantly, and very idly, and I was sorry to see my long holiday drawing to a close. My father had hoped to have sent me to Cambridge (Cambridge was a tradition in our family), but business had been very depressed of late, and a sentence of six months' hard labor had considerably straitened my poor father's resources.

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It was necessary — highly necessary — that I should choose a calling. With a sigh of resignation, I admitted as much.

"If you like," said my father, "I will take you in hand, and teach you my profession, and in a few years perhaps, I may take you into partnership; but, to be candid with you, I doubt whether it is a satisfactory calling for an athletic young fellow like you."

"I don't seem to care about it, particularly," said I.

"I'm glad to hear it," said my father; "it's a poor calling for a young man of spirit. Besides, you have to grow gray in the service before people will listen to you. It's all very well as a refuge in old age; but a young fellow is likely to make but a poor hand at it. Now, I should like to consult your own tastes on so important a matter as the choice of a profession. What do you say? The Army?"

No, I didn't care for the Army.

"Forgery? The Bar? Cornish wrecking?"

"Father," said I, "I should like to be a forger, but I write such an infernal hand."

"A regular Eton hand," said he. "Not plastic enough for forgery; but you could have a writing-master."

"It's as much as I can do to forge my own name. I don't believe I should ever be able to forge anybody else's."

"Anybody's else, you should say, not 'anybody else's.' It's a dreadful barbarism. Eton English."

"No," said I, "I should never make a fortune at it. As to wrecking — why, you know how sea-sick I am."

"You might get over that. Besides, you would deal with wrecks ashore, not wrecks at sea."

"Most of it done in small boats, I'm told. A deal of small boat work. No, I won't be a wrecker. I think I should like to be a burglar."

"Yes," said my father, considering the subject. "Yes, it's a fine manly profession; but it's dangerous, it's highly dangerous."

"Just dangerous enough to be exciting, no more."

"Well," said my father, "if you've a distinct taste for burglary I'll see what can be done."

My dear father was always prompt with pen and ink. That evening he wrote to his old friend Ferdinand Stoneleigh, a burglar of the very highest professional standing, and in a week I was duly and formally articled to him, with a view to ultimate partnership.

I had to work hard under Mr. Stoneleigh.

"Burglary is a jealous mistress," said he. "She will tolerate no rivals. She exacts the undivided devotion of her worshippers."

And so I found it. Every morning at ten o'clock I had to present myself at Stoneleigh's chambers in New Square, Lincoln's Inn, and until twelve I assisted his clerk with the correspondence. At twelve I had to go out prospecting with Stoneleigh, and from two to four I had to devote to finding out all particulars necessary to

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a scientific burglar in any given house. At first I did this merely for practice, and with no view to an actual attempt. He would tell me off to a house of which he knew all the particulars, and order me to ascertain all about the house and its inmates — their coming and going, the number of their servants, whether any of them were men and, if so, whether they slept in the basement or not, and other details necessary to be known before a burglary could be safely attempted. Then he would compare my information with his own facts, and compliment or blame me, as I might deserve. He was a strict master, but always kind, just, and courteous, as became a highly polished gentleman of the old school. He was one of the last men who habitually wore hessians.

After a year's probation, I accompanied him on several expeditions, and had the happiness to believe that I was of some little use to him. I shot him eventually in the stomach, mistaking him for the master of a house into which we were breaking (I had mislaid my dark lantern), and he died on the grand piano. His dying wish was that his compliments might be conveyed to me. I now set up on my own account, and engaged his poor old clerk, who nearly broke his heart at his late master's funeral. Stoneleigh left no family. His money — about £12,000, invested for the most part in American railways — he left to the Society for Providing More Bishops; and his ledgers, daybooks, memoranda, and papers generally he bequeathed to me.

As the chambers required furnishing, I lost no time in commencing my professional duties. I looked through his books for a suitable house to begin upon, and found the following attractive entry:

Thurloe Square. — No. 102.
House. — Medium
Occupant. — John Davis, bachelor.
Occupation. — Designer of Dados.
Age. — 86
Physical Peculiarities. — Very feeble; eccentric; drinks; Evangelical; snores.
Servants. — Two housemaids, one cook.
Sex. — All female.
Particulars of Servants. — Pretty housemaid called Rachel; open to attentions. Goes out for beer at 9 p.m.; snores. Ugly housemaid, called Bella; open to attentions; snores. Elderly cook; open to attentions; snores.
Fastenings. — Chubb's lock on street door, chain, and bolts. Bars to all basement windows. Practicable approach from third room, ground floor, which is shuttered and barred, but bar has no catch, and can be raised with table knife.
Valuable Contents of House. — Presentation plate from grateful esthetes. Gold repeater. Mulready envelope. Two diamond rings. Complete edition of "Badshaw," from 1834 to present time, 588 volumes, bound in limp calf.
General. — Mr. Davis sleeps second

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floor front; servants on third floor. Davis goes to bed at ten. No one in basement. Swarms with beetles; otherwise excellent house for purpose.

This seemed to me to be a capital house to try singlehanded. At twelve o'clock that very night I pocketed two crowbars, a bunch of skeleton keys, a centre-bit, a dark lantern, a box of silent matches, some putty, a life-preserver, and a knife; and I set off at once for Thurloe Square. I remember that it snowed heavily. There was at least a foot of snow on the ground, and there was more to come. Poor Stoneleigh's particulars were exact in every detail. I got into the third room on the ground floor without any difficulty, and made my way into the dining-room. There was the presentation plate, sure enough — about 800 ounces, as I reckoned. I collected this, and tied it up so that I could carry it without attracting attention.

Just as I had finished, I heard a slight cough behind me. I turned and saw a dear old silver-haired gentleman in a dressing-gown standing in the doorway. The venerable gentleman covered me with a revolver.

My first impulse was to rush at and brain him with my life-preserver.

"Don't move," said he, "or you're a dead man."

A rather silly remark occurred to me to the effect that if I did move, it would rather prove that I was a live man; but I dismissed it at once as unsuited to the nature of the interview.

"You're a burglar?" said he.

"I have that honor," said I, making for my pistol-pocket.

"Don't move," said he; "I have often wished to have the pleasure of encountering a burglar, in order to be able to test a favorite theory of mine as to how persons of that class should be dealt with. But you mustn't move."

I replied that I should be happy to assist him, if I could do so consistently with a due regard to my own safety.

"Promise me," said I, "that you will allow me to leave the house unmolested when your experiment is at an end?"

"If you will obey me promptly, you shall be at perfect liberty to leave the house."

"You will neither give me into custody, nor take any steps to pursue me?"

"On my honor as a Designer of Dados," said he.

"Good," said I; "go on."

"Stand up," said he, "and stretch out your arms at right angles to your body."

"Suppose I don't?" said I.

"I send a bullet through your left ear," said he.

"But permit me to observe ——" said I.

Bang! A ball cut off the lobe of my left ear.

The ear smarted, and I should have liked to attend to it, but under the circumstances I thought it better to comply with the whimsical old gentleman's wishes.

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"Very good," said he. "Now do as I tell you, promptly and without a moment's hesitation, or I cut off the lobe of your right ear. Throw me that life-preserver."

"But ——"

"Ah, would you?" said he, cocking the revolver.

The "click" decided me. Besides, the old gentleman's eccentricity amused me, and I was curious to see how far it would carry him. So I tossed my life-preserver to him. He caught it neatly.

"Now take off your coat and throw it to me."

I took off my coat, and threw it diagonally across the room.

"Now the waistcoat."

I threw the waistcoat to him.

"Boots," said he.

"They are shoes," said I, in some trepidation lest he should take offense when no offense was really intended.

"Shoes then," said he.

I threw my shoes to him.

"Trousers," said he.

"Come, come; I say," exclaimed I.

Bang! The lobe of the other ear came off. With all his eccentricity the old gentleman was a man of his word. He had the trousers, and with them my revolver, which happened to be in the right-hand pocket.

"Now the rest of your drapery."

I threw him the rest of my drapery. He tied up my clothes in the tablecloth; and, telling me that he wouldn't detain me any longer, made for the door with the bundle under his arm.

"Stop," said I. "What is to become of me?"

"Really, I hardly know," said he.

"You promised me my liberty," said I.

"Certainly," said he. "Don't let me trespass any further on your time. You will find the street door open; or, if from force of habit you prefer the window, you will have no difficulty in clearing the area railings."

"But I can't go like this! Won't you give me something to put on?"

"No," said he, "nothing at all. Good night."

The quaint old man left the room with my bundle. I went after him, but I found that he had locked an inner door that led up stairs. The position was really a difficult one to deal with. I couldn't possibly go into the street as I was, and if I remained I should certainly be given into custody in the morning. For some time I looked in vain for something to cover myself with. The hats and great coats were no doubt in the inner hall; at all events, they were not accessible under the circumstances. There was a carpet on the floor, but it was fitted to the recesses of the room and, moreover, a heavy sideboard stood upon it.

However, there were twelve chairs in the room, and it was with no little pleasure I found on the back of each an antimacassar. Twelve antimacassars would go a long way towards covering me, and that was something.

I did my best with the antimacassars, but on reflection I came to the conclusion that they would not help

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me very much. They certainly covered me, but a gentleman walking through South Kensington at 3 a.m. dressed in nothing whatever but antimacassars, with the snow two feet deep on the ground, would be sure to attract attention. I might pretend that I was doing it for a wager, but who would believe me?

I grew very cold.

I looked out of the window, and presently saw the bull's-eye of a policeman who was wearily plodding through the snow. I felt that my only course was to surrender to him.

"Policeman," said I, from the window, "one word."

"Anything wrong, sir?" said he.

"I have been committing a burglary in this house, and shall feel deeply obliged to you if you will kindly take me into custody."

"Nonsense, sir," said he; "you'd better go to bed."

"There is nothing I should like better, but I live in Lincoln's Inn, and I have nothing on but antimacassars; I am almost frozen. Pray take me."

"The street door's open," said he.

"Yes," said I. "Come in and take me, if you will."

He came in. I explained the circumstances to him, and with great difficulty I convinced him that I was in earnest. The good fellow put his own great coat over me, and lent me his own handcuffs. In ten minutes I was thawing myself in Walton Street police station. In ten days I was convicted at the Old Bailey. In ten years I returned from penal servitude.

I found that poor Mr. Davis had gone to his long home in Brompton Cemetery.

For many years I never passed his house without a shudder at the terrible hours I spent in it as his guest. I have often tried to forget the incident I have been relating, and for a long time I tried in vain. Perseverance, however, met with its reward. I continued to try. Gradually one detail after another slipped from memory, and one lovely evening last May I found, to my intense delight, that I had absolutely forgotten all about it.

IN CASE YOU DIDN'T KNOW . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE is now publishing foreign language editions of *EQMM* for aficionados of crime and detection in France, Germany and Brazil. Also, an English language edition is specially printed in Australia. Subscriptions for delivery in most countries may be obtained at $5.00 a year by writing to *EQMM* at 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

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GUESS WHO?

by TALBOT C. HATCH

WITHOUT doubt he has the highest conceit of himself of any man ever born of woman, and there is never an occasion in his long history when the author of his being denies him the gratification of this vanity. He *knows*, and never allows for a moment any doubt to exist, that he can rise to whatever occasions may confront him and turn up in the last chapter with the booty and the girl. We know little of his origins or his early days. With the blaring of trumpets and the crashing of cymbals he appeared in the year of our Lord 1929 as a full-blown character of romantic virtuosity and, through a spate of some thirty volumes, more or less, he has blazoned a trail of swashbuckling skullduggery that has left the world breathless.

He was born in anonymity and might so have remained had he not early adopted a titillating signature to his various adventures and by so doing captured the imagination of the world at large, and that, in particular, of certain dignitaries whose position in life is to protect and guard the public weal. As a matter of fact, his identity was soon so thoroughly established that he now is as well-known on the strands of Samarkand as in the purlieus of Old London and in the skyscraping reaches of New York.

He is a gay and fearless chap, clever, ruthless and, withal, a blithely irresponsible one. His greatest pleasure is to mock and deride his opponents, and his eyes have a dancing, laughing devil in them on such occasions; when he is bedeviled by anger, however, they have a chilled steel quality almost impossible to face. Danger and risks are food and drink to him and he is the sort of lad of whom it might be said that he is a flippant dandy with the heart of a crusader. And it certainly can be asserted without fear of contradiction that he wears this manner with an indefinable air of strength and recklessness and quixotic bravado.

His magnificent flamboyance cannot better be expressed than by the careless elegance with which he wears his clothes, and this, regardless of whether it be his "fighting kit" or his "gentleman's disguise" as he so describes them. The first consists of gray flannel bags and tweed shooting jacket of almost legendary age; and the second of a gray flannel suit that fits him with staggering perfection and wears the unostentatious seal of Savile Row on every stitch, a dazzlingly snowy white silk shirt, a tie to shame the rainbow, chamois gloves, and gold-mounted, ebony walking stick — all immaculate and unmistakably of the best.

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In person he is keen-faced, six feet two inches tall, and he weighs 175 pounds. His eyes are blue and his black hair is brushed straight back. He has a deeply tanned complexion and he carries a bullet scar through his upper left shoulder and another 8-inch scar on his right forearm.

He is a mad and furious driver of high-powered cars, one of many he owns being a silver-nosed Hirondel that is his pride and joy. He is a licensed air pilot and can outstunt the nerviest, and he is a boxer and wrestler without peer, whether it be under the Marquis of Queensbury rules or under the "no holds or punches barred" of rough-and-tumble fighting. While he considers golf a bore, and tennis and baseball as next to nothing at all, he is the supreme master at fencing and can swim for miles tirelessly and finish at racing speed. He is an expert horse wrangler and can put an arrow through a greengage held between your thumb and forefinger at twenty paces. With equal facility he can throw a knife through or shoot out the three leaves of the ace of clubs at the same range.

As has been intimated, this engaging fellow is not exactly on the side of law and order; to the contrary it must be admitted that he is a malefactor of the first water and as much committed to thievery, kidnaping, and sudden death as any man alive. At the same time it must be further admitted that there are few detectives to equal him in point of intuitive ratiocination, in incisive foreknowledge of events to come, or in audacious maneuvering to circumvent them. He is at once a colorful and glamorous rogue seeking ways to ameliorate the woes of the little people, and at the same time a predatory and relentless enemy of the ungodly. Put him on the track of a mean and vicious offender and swift vengeance follows. Nevertheless he avers: "I am not a dick because I can't be bothered with red tape, but I'm on the same side."

If, perchance, you are seeking all around Robin Hood's barn to determine his identity, and you still cannot bring up the answer to *GUESS WHO?* — you will find the solution below, printed upside down.

Solution

Well, we really didn't think we could fool you. Simon Templar, better known as "The Saint," is far too colorful a figure to have escaped international renown. The pet, need we add, of his fabulous creator — Leslie Charteris.

Watch for a brand-new story of "The Saint" in next month's issue. *The Arrow of God*, a saintly adventure with Chestertonian overtones, is one of Leslie Charteris's best short stories — and one of the group which won Special Awards in last year's contest.

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QUEEN'S QUORUM: *Part Three*

by ELLERY QUEEN

In 1888 Eden Phillpotts's first book marked the beginning of one of the most prolific writing careers of our time. Although Mr. Phillpotts's best short story — *The Three Dead Men*, about detective Michael Duveen — is included in a later volume titled BLACK, WHITE AND BRINDLED (London: Grant Richards, 1923), cornerstone honor should be accorded to Mr. Phillpotts's maiden mystery, the thin, fragile book with "rainbow" stamping which is seldom found even in the so-called complete collections of Eden Phillpotts's work.

13. Eden Phillpotts's
MY ADVENTURE IN THE FLYING SCOTSMAN
London: James Hogg, 1888

In the same year, 1888, another prolific writer made his debut in the short-story field — Dick Donovan, whose real name was Joyce Emmerson Preston Muddock. Like "Waters" and "M'Govan" before him, Donovan wrote in the first person and was, so to speak, his own detective; and like both, Donovan's importance today is chiefly historical. His first volume of short stories

14. Dick Donovan's
THE MAN-HUNTER
London: Chatto & Windus, 1888

was succeeded by books with Dime Novelish titles — CAUGHT AT LAST!, LINK BY LINK, FROM CLUE TO CAPTURE, FOUND AND FETTERED, and still later by slightly modernized but none the less flavorful titles like THE ADVENTURES OF TYLER TATLOCK: PRIVATE DETECTIVE and THE ADVENTURES OF FABIAN FIELD: CRIMINOLOGIST.

Half a century has now passed since Poe's magnificent, and as Gilbert K. Chesterton has conceded, still unsurpassed crystallization of the genre. In the fifty years between Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and the atomic appearance of the Sherlock Holmes short stories, the world produced

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fourteen indisputable cornerstones in the short-story form. From now on let us keep a statistical eye on the rise and fall in the number of key books, decade by decade.

IV. The Doyle Decade

Sherlock Holmes's first appearance in print occurred in 1887 — in the unforgettable A STUDY IN SCARLET. The first book of Sherlock Holmes short stories was not published until five years later. In the meantime

15. Israel Zangwill's
THE BIG BOW MYSTERY
London: Henry, 1892

gave the world its first fully-developed "locked room." In the Introduction written especially for the 1895 edition of this remarkable book, Mr. Zangwill wrote: "For long before the book was written, I said to myself one night that no mystery-monger had ever murdered a man in a room to which there was no possible access. The puzzle was scarcely propounded ere the solution flew up and the idea lay stored in my mind till, years later . . . the editor of a popular London evening paper, anxious to let the sea-serpent have a year off, asked me to provide him with a more original piece of fiction." A more original piece of fiction indeed! Israel Zangwill added simple, daring, brilliant ingenuity to Poe's original concept of a "sealed room" mystery, and thus founded a dynasty of locked-room magicians whose current emperor is the ever-surprising John Dickson Carr.

And then came Sherlock Holmes.

One of the most penetrating observations made on the character of Sherlock Holmes was written in 1907 by Frank Wadleigh Chandler in his THE LITERATURE OF ROGUERY: "Where Dupin was sheer reason, and Lecoq sheer energy, Sherlock Holmes is reason governing energy." It is in A. Conan Doyle's short stories, more so than in his novels, that we meet the real Sherlock Holmes — that tall, excessively lean man with the thin razor-like face and hawk's-bill of a nose; his nervous pacing up and down the fabulous room at 221B Baker Street, head sunk upon his chest; his quick, eager way of examining the scene of a crime, on all fours, nose to the ground; the gaunt dynamic figure and the incisive speech; the familiar props of the curved pipe and the dressing gown, the gasogene, Persian slipper, scraping violin, and coal scuttle for the cigars; the bullet-pocks on the wall and the hypodermic syringe; the ghostly hansom cab rattling through the mist and fog and the eternal game afoot; all conjured up by that peculiarly magical and inexplicably satisfying combination of syllables

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— Sherlock Holmes — which is now so permanent a part of the English language. From any critical standard the first book of Sherlock Holmes short stories

16. A. Conan Doyle's
THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES
London: George Newnes, 1892

is one of the world's masterworks. When we remember the spectacular and enduring success of the Sherlock Holmes stories — how long queues of fanatical fans waited in line, World Series fashion, for a new issue of the "Strand Magazine"; how the early books, when they appeared, were literally read to tatters, so that it has become almost impossible to find immaculate copies of the first editions — we assume that the Holmes books must have sold in the millions. It is true that all told, including the "cheap" and pirated editions, millions of copies have been printed; but compared with present-day bestsellers, the original editions of the first Sherlock Holmes books sold in surprisingly small quantities. This astonishing fact is confirmed by the sales record of THE ADVENTURES: the first reprint in England was issued in 1895, three years after THE ADVENTURES appeared originally in book form; in those three years only 30,000 copies were distributed — the first "cheap" edition of 1895 is so marked on the title-page.

In 1894 the detective-crime story in England took a pseudo-scientific turn. The so-called "medical mysteries" became popular and while classic "first" position is usually attributed to

17. L. T. Meade's and Dr. Clifford Halifax's
STORIES FROM THE DIARY OF A DOCTOR*
London: George Newnes, 1894

research has again proved that, as in most matters detectival, it was America that blazed the trail. Some of the stories in TALES OF ECCENTRIC LIFE (New York: D. Appleton, 1886), written by Dr. William A. Hammond and his daughter Clara Lanza, anticipate the British "medical mystery" by a full eight years; indeed, the Hammond-Lanza book preceded by one year even the initial appearance in print of Sherlock Holmes.

As Vincent Starrett once wrote: "After Holmes, the deluge!" Imitators multiplied rabbitly, and if you look closely, you will see the same spawning

* The second series (London: Bliss, Sands & Foster, 1896) bore the same book title. When this sequel was reissued later, the title was changed slightly — to STORIES FROM THE "DIARY OF A DOCTOR" (London: Sands, 1910).

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process going on still. The Holmes pattern persists even today. Of the contemporary imitators the most durable (indeed, the only important one to survive the years) is the private investigator, a man of awe-inspiring technical and statistical knowledge, in

18. Arthur Morrison's
MARTIN HEWITT, INVESTIGATOR
London: Ward, Lock & Bowden, 1894

Although the detective story was born in short-story form, there have been periods in its history when the short form has been treated stepchildishly. Publishers discovered that short stories do not always sell as well as full-length novels; to counteract this deplorable condition publishers resorted to various devices, editorial and typographic, to make volumes of shorts *look* like novels. An interesting example of this bibliodeception occurred in the American edition of THE RED TRIANGLE, the last of the Martin Hewitt tetralogy. The first United States edition was made up of bound English sheets, the original English contents page being retained and clearly indicating THE RED TRIANGLE to be a book of short stories. Apparently the American edition sold well; when the bound-sheets edition was exhausted, the publisher, L. C. Page of Boston, manufactured plates of the English page-sheets and printed reissues of the book from these plates. To disguise the book as a novel, however, the publisher substituted a new contents page which transforms the original six short stories into twenty-three *chapters*, and to further the illusion that THE RED TRIANGLE was a single sustained tale, chapter numerals and chapter titles were inserted throughout the book in a type face obviously different from the original English set-up. If the book were reprinted today, it is still doubtful if an American publisher would restore THE RED TRIANGLE to its legitimate short-story status.

In 1895 M. P. Shiel, that comparatively unsung genius of the weird and the fantastic, had his first book published. The three short stories in

19. M. P. Shiel's
PRINCE ZALESKI
London: John Lane, 1895

are a frank throwback to Poe's Dupin trilogy. Dorothy L. Sayers once wrote that the "curious and elaborate beauty [of PRINCE ZALESKI] recaptures in every arabesque sentence the very accent of Edgar Allan Poe." Like Poe, Shiel wearied of his eccentric sleuth and abandoned him. Fifty years later he revived the character especially for "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" — but strangely enough, we did not know of the epic event

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until it was too late. The details were sent to us by John Gawsworth, a personal friend and at times a collaborator of Mr. Shiel's. As Gawsworth expressed it, the return of Prince Zaleski nearly cost Mr. Shiel his life. The fourth, and last, Prince Zaleski story was written in October 1945, when the author was past eighty. As soon as the manuscript was finished, Mr. Shiel walked to Horsham to mail it to *EQMM's* First Annual Short Story Contest. The effort was too much for the grand old man: he fainted and was taken to a hospital. When he recovered Mr. Shiel was uncertain whether or not he had actually posted the manuscript. In any event, the story never reached "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine," and no trace of the original was ever found. Mr. Shiel died on February 17, 1947 and the mystery of the missing manuscript — like that of George Bernard Shaw's more than sixty years before — will probably remain a mystery forever. But think: if an accident of fate had not intervened, we should have gained possession of the only Prince Zaleski original manuscript extant! — a precious possession now lost to the world.

In 1896 Melville Davisson Post made the first of his two momentous contributions to the detective-crime short story. The publication of

20. Melville Davisson Post's
THE STRANGE SCHEMES OF
RANDOLPH MASON
New York: G. P. Putnam, 1896

introduced the first "criminal" lawyer in detective fiction. Note the quotes: they mean an unscrupulous lawyer who uses the inadequacies and weaknesses of the law itself to defeat justice.

The character of Randolph Mason was an important and historic innovation. Mr. Post's motives in originating what was then a shocking and unorthodox literary protagonist are best explained by the author himself. In his Introduction to THE STRANGE SCHEMES, Mr. Post wrote: "Poe and the French writers constructed masterpieces [of crime] in the early days. Later came the flood of 'Detective Stories' until the stomach of the reader failed. Yesterday, Mr. Conan Doyle created Sherlock Holmes, and the public pricked up its ears and listened with interest.

"It is significant that the general plan of this kind of tale has never once been changed to any degree. The writers, one and all, have labored, often with great genius, to construct problems in crime, where by acute deduction the criminal and his methods were determined; or, reversing it, they have sought to plan the crime so cunningly as to effectually conceal the criminal and his methods. The intent has always been to baffle the trailer, and when the identity of the criminal was finally revealed, the story ended.

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"The high ground of the field of crime has not been explored; it has not even been entered. The book-stalls have been filled to weariness with tales based upon plans whereby the *detective*, or *ferreting* power of the State might be baffled. But, prodigious marvel! no writer has attempted to construct tales based upon plans whereby the *punishing* power of the State might be baffled.

"The distinction, if one pauses for a moment to consider it, is striking. It is possible, even easy, deliberately to plan crimes so that the criminal . . . cannot be detected. Is it possible to plan and execute wrongs in such a manner that they will have all the . . . resulting profit of desperate crimes and yet not be crimes before the law?

". . . This is the field into which the author has ventured, and he believes it to be new and full of interest."

Surely Mr. Post found something new under the sun.

In the second book of the series, THE MAN OF LAST RESORT (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1897), Randolph Mason was still obsessed with one idea: that the difficulties of men are merely problems that he, Mason, can solve, and that the law, being of human origin, can be evaded. In one of the stories in this second book Mason explains his immoral and misanthropic code: "No man who has followed my advice has ever committed a crime. Crime is a technical word. It is the law's name for certain acts which it is pleased to define and punish with a penalty . . . There is no such thing [as a moral wrong] . . . What the law permits is right, else it would prohibit it. What the law prohibits is wrong, because it punishes it . . . The word moral is a purely metaphysical symbol."

But it came to pass in the course of retrospection that Melville Davisson Post found regret or repentance in his heart. Outer pressure or inner conscience brought a change, rich and strange, in Randolph Mason. In the third and last book of his deeds and misdeeds, THE CORRECTOR OF DESTINIES (New York: Edward J. Clode, 1908), Mason reformed and began using his vast legal knowledge to aid, rather than to defeat, justice. *Sic transit gloria immundi . . .**

The conception of a "criminal" lawyer probably exerted a strong influence on the mind of the author who produced the next cornerstone. So far we have had detectives of almost all types — then a "criminal" detective — and now the all-out criminal takes the short-story stage. The first great rogue of mystery fiction who laughed at the police, who

* It is curious that a generation later Erle Stanley Gardner selected the same surname for Perry Mason, his lawyer-detective.

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playfully pilfered, purloined, and pluck-pigeoned his way to pecuniary profits, and who was clever enough to go scot-free, is Colonel Clay in

21. Grant Allen's
AN AFRICAN MILLIONAIRE
London: Grant Richards, 1897

The "illustrious" Colonel Clay has been shamefully neglected. The Adam of yeggmen preceded the infinitely more celebrated Raffles by two years — long enough to entitle the Colonel to top honors as the first great short-story thief on the criminaliterary scene. The scarce first edition of his fancy filching and fleecing shows an illustration in gold-leaf on the front cover of a Pied Piper followed not by children but by winged money-bags.

Another 1897 book which deserves mention is Robert W. Chambers's THE MYSTERY OF CHOICE (New York: D. Appleton, 1897) containing a detective story about butterfly collecting in Brittany, France. Although published half a century ago, *The Purple Emperor* reads as if it were written yesterday — it is so modern in style and substance.

In the meantime the female of the species had been perking up. A young lady in her early thirties, invariably dressed in black and Quaker-like in her neat primness, began investigating crimes in C. L. Pirkis's THE EXPERIENCES OF LOVEDAY BROOKE, LADY DETECTIVE (London: Hutchinson, 1894). Lovely Loveday had "the faculty — so rare among women — of carrying out orders to the very letter." A more important she-sleuth came into being in

22. George R. Sims's
DORCAS DENE, DETECTIVE*
London: F. V. White, 1897

Dorcas Dene, née Lester, was a small-part actress who deserted the stage to marry a young artist. Her husband went blind, forcing her to earn a living for the two of them. A lucky circumstance gave Dorcas an opportunity to use her histrionic abilities in rescuing "an unhappy man being so brutally blackmailed that he ran away from his broken-hearted wife and his sorrowing children." Dorcas's success in her first undertaking led eventually to her becoming one of the best professional lady detectives in England. By and large, however, the damsel dicks were far behind their male rivals. They were still typical bloomer girls, wearing mannish hats and traipsing around daringly on bicycles-built-for-one. As gumshoes, they were "the weaker sex"; as manhunters, however, they were "the stronger sex" — but in a purely romantic sense. An illustration of this paradox can be found in the work of M. McDonnell Bodkin. First came

* The second series (London: F. V. White, 1898) was published under the same title.

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23. M. McDonnell Bodkin's
PAUL BECK, THE RULE OF
THUMB DETECTIVE
London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1898

This was followed by DORA MYRL, THE LADY DETECTIVE (London: Chatto & Windus, 1900). Having created a detective of each sex, you might expect so fertile an author as Mr. Bodkin to bring forth next either a boy-detective or a girl-detective. Ah, be patient, dear reader! Mr. Bodkin, obviously a student of genetics, felt that certain intermediate steps were necessary — as indeed they are. So the author conceived the ingenious idea of making his male sleuth and his female sleuth adversaries. He contrived this duello in a novel called — note the title! — THE CAPTURE OF PAUL BECK (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909). At the end of the novel Paul Beck won the detectival engagement, but Dora Myrl won an even more glamorous engagement. In a phrase, she got her man — becoming Mrs. Paul Beck and thus inaugurating what is possibly the earliest *family* in mystery fiction. For in a later book, YOUNG BECK (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911), a son is born and inevitably Paul Jr. becomes a detective in his own right.

You see the point? Distaff detectives always get their man — be he thief, murderer, blackmailer — or *husband!*

(to be continued next month)

THE VANISHING DIAMONDS

by M. McDONNELL BODKIN

SHE was as bright as a butterfly in a flower garden, and as restless, quivering down to her fingertips with impatient excitement. That big room in the big house in Upper Belgrave Street was no bad notion of the flower garden.

There were just a few square yards of clear space where she sat alone — on a couch made for two — patting the soft carpet with a restless little foot. The rest of the room was filled with long tables, and oval tables, and round tables, all crowded with the pretty trifles and trinkets that ladies love. It seemed as if half a dozen of the smartest jewelers and fancy shops of Regent Street had emptied their show windows into the room. The tables were all aglow with the gleam of gold and silver and the glitter of jewels, and the bright

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tints of rich silk and painted fans, and rare and dainty porcelain.

For Lilian Ray was to marry Sydney Harcourt in a week, and there was not a more popular couple in London. Her sweet face and winning ways had taken the heart of society by storm; and all the world knew that warm-hearted, hot-headed Harcourt was going hop, step, and jump to the devil when she caught and held him. So everybody was pleased, and said it was a perfect match, and for the last three weeks the wedding presents came pouring into the big house in Upper Belgrave Street, and flooded the front drawing-room. Lilian was impatient, but it was the impatience of delight.

No wonder she was excited, for her lover was coming, and with him were coming the famous Harcourt diamonds, which had been the delight and admiration and envy of fashionable London for half a century. The jewels had gone from the bank, where they had lain in darkness and safety for a dozen years, to the glittering shop of Mr. Ophir, of Bond Street. For the setting was very old, and the vigilance of the tiny silver points that guarded the priceless morsels of bright stone had to be looked to, and a brand-new case was ordered to set the precious sparklers off to the best advantage.

A sudden knock at the door starts her again to the window, the cobweb silk flying behind. But she turns away petulantly like a spoiled child.

"Only another traveling bag," she says; "that makes seven — two with gold fittings. I wonder if this has gold fittings. I have set them all there in a row with their mouths open, and their gold or silver teeth grinning. There is not room for another one. I wonder do people think that ——"

The sentence was never finished, for at this moment a hansom cab came sharply round the corner in full view of the window. She caught one glimpse of an eager young face and a flat parcel, then she dropped back into her couch, panting a little. There came a second knock, and a foot on the stairs mounting three steps at a spring. She heard it, and knew it, but sat quite still. Another moment and he was in the room. Her eyes welcomed him, though her lips pouted.

"You are ten minutes before your time, sir," she said, "and I am terribly busy. What have you got there?"

"Oh! you little sly-boots. You know you have been longing for me and the diamonds, especially the diamonds, for the last hour. I've a great mind to carry them off again."

He dropped into the seat beside her and his right arm stole round her waist, while he held the jewel-case away in his left hand. She blushed and laughed, and slipping from his encircling arm, made a dash for the diamonds. But he was too quick for her. He leaped to his feet and held the case aloft. Straining to the utmost of her tip-toes she could just reach one hand to his elbow; she placed the other among his brown curls, making ready for a leap. Her

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face was close to his and quite undefended. What happened was, under the circumstances, inevitable.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in quite a natural tone of surprise.

"Payment in advance," he retorted, as the precious case came down to her desiring hands; "overpayment, I confess, but then I am ready to give change to any amount."

But she fled from him, with her treasure, to the couch. "Now to be sensible for one short moment, if you can, and hand me the scissors out of that lady's companion there beside the photograph frame on the table."

The jewel-case was done up in whitey-brown paper with strong cord and sealed with broad patches of red sealing-wax. Quite excitedly she cut through the string, leaving the seals unbroken, and let paper and twine and wax go down in a heap on the carpet together.

There emerged from the inner wrapping of soft, white tissue-paper the jewel-case in its new coat of light brown morocco with the monogram L. H. in neat gold letters on it. She gave a little cry of pleasure as her eyes fell on the lettering which proclaimed the jewels her very own, and he, sitting close beside, watching lovingly as one watches a pretty child at play, made believe to snatch it from her fingers. But she held it tight. Like a bather on the water's brim, she paused for one tantalizing moment, drew a deep breath to make ready for the coming cry of rapture, and opened the case.

It was empty!

The slope of the raised centre of violet velvet was just ruffled a little, like a bed that had been slept in. That was all.

She looked suddenly in his eyes, half amused, half accusingly, for she thought he had played her some trick. His face was grave and startled.

"What does it mean, Syd? Are you playing with me?" But she knew from his face he was quite serious even while she asked.

"I cannot make it out, Lil," he said, in an altered voice. "I cannot make it out at all. I brought the case just as it was from Mr. Ophir's. He told me he had put the diamonds in and sealed it up with his own hands. See, you have not even broken the seals," and he mechanically picked up the litter of paper and twine from the floor. "No one touched it since except myself and you, and the diamonds are gone. Old Ophir would no more dream of playing such a trick than an archbishop. Still it must be either that or —— But that is too absurd. He's as respectable as the Bank of England, and nearly as rich. It beats me, Lily. Why, the old boy warned me as he gave me the precious parcel. 'We cannot be too careful, Mr. Harcourt,' he said. 'There is twenty thousand pounds in that little parcel; let no hand touch it except your own.' And I did not, of course; yet the diamonds have vanished, through case and paper and seals, into space."

He stared ruefully at the expanse of violet velvet.

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"The first thing is to see Mr. Ophir," he said.

"Oh, don't leave me, Syd."

"Well to write him then. There must be some ridiculous mistake somewhere. Perhaps he gave me the wrong case. He would never —— No, that's too absurd. Perhaps someone substituted the empty case when he looked aside for a moment. It may be necessary to employ a detective. I'll tell him so at once. Can I write a line anywhere?"

"There are half a dozen writing-cases there in a row on that table."

She sat him down to a pretty mother-of-pearl and tortoise-shell affair, with violet scented ink in the silver-mounted bottles.

Then Harcourt showed a quick impatience, quite unlike his usual sunny manner, which Lilian thought nothing could disturb.

"Do get a fellow some decent ink, Lil," he said, pettishly. "I cannot write to an old don like Ophir with this stuff."

She slipped from the room like a shadow and was back again almost in a moment. When she returned she found him on the couch nervously fingering the fragments of paper, twine, and sealing-wax.

"I cannot make it out at all," he muttered. "They seem to have vanished into thin air. However, old Ophir will be able to help us if anyone can."

He growled a bit at the dainty feminine pen and paper and then began:

"DEAR MR. OPHIR, — A most extraordinary thing has happened. I took the case you gave me, as you gave it to me, straight to Miss Ray, Belgrave Street, and opened it without breaking the seals, by cutting the strings in her presence. The diamonds were gone. There must be some mistake somewhere. Perhaps you may be able to clear up the mystery. If you suspect dishonesty, engage a detective at once. The driver will wait for a reply.

"Yours in haste,

"SYDNEY HARCOURT."

He ran downstairs himself to hail a cab to take the note. A smart hansom with a smart driver on the box was crawling up the street. He dashed across with sudden alacrity, like a startled trout in a stream, when Harcourt raised his hand, almost taking the feet off a sturdy mendicant who was standing in front of the door.

"Here, my man. Take this to Mr. Ophir's, in Bond Street. The address is on the envelope. Wait for an answer — double fare if you look sharp."

The driver took the letter, touched his hat, and was off like a shot.

Harcourt threw the grumbling beggar a shilling and slammed the door. If he had waited just one second, he would have seen the beggar go off almost as quickly as the hansom, and disappear round the corner.

"Oh, Sydney, do cheer up a little," pleaded Lily, transformed from tease to comforter. "They will come all right. If they don't, I won't mind in the least, and your father is too fond

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of you, and of me, I think, too, to be really angry. It wasn't your fault, anyway."

"Well, you see how it is, Lil; the infernal things were lost out of my hands. They were a mighty big prize for anyone to get hold of, and I have been going the pace a bit before I met you, my darling, and many people think I have outrun the bailiff. So there is sure to be malicious whispering and tattling, and people may say — no, I cannot tell you what they may say, and what is more, I don't care a — dash. You can never say or think or look anything but what's kind, and I would not have a pucker in that pretty brow or a tear in your blue eyes for all the diamonds that ever came out of Golconda. The diamonds may go hang. 'Here's metal more attractive.' "

Wonderful is Love's Lethe. In five minutes the diamonds had vanished from their memory as completely as they had vanished from the case. The sound and sight of a cab whirling to the door brought them suddenly back to the work-a-day world.

A footman entered, bearing in the very centre of a silver salver a visiting card slightly soiled. Harcourt took it.

"Mr. Paul Beck,
Private Detective."

"What is he like, Tomlinson?"

"Stout party in gray, sir. Don't seem particular bright."

"Well, show him up."

"Who can he be? What can he want?" muttered Harcourt to himself uneasily when the footman disappeared. "There was no time to get to Ophir and back, much less to find a detective. I cannot make it out."

"Oh, he came to the door like a whirlwind; and you know we never know how time goes when we are talking of ——"

"Mr. Paul Beck," said the discreet footman, opening the door with a flourish.

Mr. Paul Beck did not require much showing up apparently. He slipped furtively into the room, keeping his back as much as possible to the light, as if secrecy had grown a habit with him. He was a stout, strongly built man in dark gray tweed, suggesting rather the notion of a respectable retired milkman than a detective. His face was ruddy, and fringed with reddish brown whiskers, and his light brown hair curled like a water dog's. There was a chronic look of mild surprise in his wide-open blue eyes, and his smile was innocent as a child's.

Just as he entered, Lilian thought she noticed one quick, keen glance at where the empty jewel-case lay on the table and the tangle of paper and twine under it. But before she could be sure, the expression vanished from his eyes like a transparency when the light goes out.

Harcourt knew the man by reputation as one of the cleverest detectives in London — a man who had puzzled out mysteries where even the famous Mr. Murdock Rose had failed — but looking at him now he could hardly

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believe the reputation was deserved.

"Mr. Beck," he said, "will you take a chair? You come, I presume, about ——"

"About those diamonds," said Mr. Beck abruptly, without making any motion to sit down. "I was fortunately with Mr. Ophir when your note came. He asked me to take charge of the case. Your cabman lost no time, and here I am."

"He told you the facts."

"Very briefly."

"And you think ——"

"I don't think. I am quite sure I know where and how to lay my hands on the diamonds."

He spoke confidently. Lilian thought she saw the trace of a smile on the innocent-looking mouth, and a futile attempt to wink.

"I am delighted you think so," said Harcourt; "I am exceedingly anxious about the matter. Did Mr. Ophir suggest ——"

"Nothing," broke in Mr. Beck again. "I didn't want his suggestions. Time is of importance, not talk. We are running on a hot scent; we must not give it time to cool. Is that the jewel-case?"

"Yes," said Harcourt, taking it up and opening it; "just as it came, empty."

Mr. Beck abruptly closed it again and put it in his pocket.

"That's the paper and twine that was around it, I suppose?"

Harcourt nodded. Mr. Beck picked it up carefully and put it in the other pocket.

"You will observe," said Harcourt, "that the seal is not broken. The string was cut by Miss Ray. But when ——"

"I must wish you good-day, Mr. Harcourt," said the unceremonious detective. "Good-day, miss."

"Have you finished your investigation already?" said Harcourt in surprise. "Surely you cannot have already found a clue?"

"I have found all I wanted and expected: I see my way pretty plainly to lay my hands on the thief. When I have more news to tell I'll write. Good-day for the present."

He was manifestly eager to be off on his mission. Almost before Harcourt could reply he was out of the room and down the stairs. He opened the door for himself, and the hansom which he had kept waiting whirled him away at headlong speed.

He had not disappeared five minutes down one side of the street when another hansom, driven at the same rapid pace, came tearing up the other. Lilian and Sydney had not got well over their surprise at his abrupt departure when a second knock came to the door, and Tomlinson entered again with a salver and a card — a clean one this time —

"Mr. Paul Beck,
Private Detective."

Harcourt started.

"The same man, Tomlinson?"

"The same, sir; leastways he seems a very absent-minded gentleman.

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'Any one been here for the last ten minutes?' he said, breathless-like, when I opened the door. 'You was, sir,' I said, 'not five minutes ago.' 'Oh, was I?' says he, with a queer kind of a laugh, 'that's quick and no mistake. Am I here now?' 'Of course you are, sir,' I said, looking at him hard, but he seemed no way in liquor; 'there you are and there you stand.' 'Oh, I mean did I go away at all?' 'Fast as a hansom could carry you, sir,' I said, humoring him; for he was as serious as a judge, and seemed quite put out to hear he had gone away in a hansom. 'That's bad, that's bad,' he said; 'ten minutes late. Well, young man, there is no help for it. Take this card to Mr. Harcourt.' Shall I show him up, sir?"

"Of course."

"What can it mean?" cried Lilian. "Surely he cannot have found them in five minutes?"

"Perhaps so," said Harcourt. "He has probably found some clue, anyhow. His sober chaff of poor Tomlinson in the hall looks as if he were in good humor about something. Gad, I didn't think the old chap had so much fun in him!"

"Mr. Paul Beck, sir."

There was a slight, indescribable change in the manner of Mr. Beck as he now entered the room. He was less furtive and less abrupt in his movements, and he seemed no longer anxious to keep his back to the light.

"You are back again very soon, Mr. Beck," said Harcourt. "Have you got a clue?"

"I wish I had come five minutes sooner," said Mr. Beck, his voice quite changed. "I'm afraid I have lost a clue. I have lost *the* clue in fact, and I must set about to finding it. Where is the jewel-case?"

"Why, I gave it to you not ten minutes ago."

"To me?" began Mr. Beck, and then stopped himself with a queer smile that was half a grimace. "Oh, yes, you gave it to me. Well, and what did I do with it?"

"I don't understand you in the least."

"Well, you need not understand me. But you can answer me."

"Mr. Beck, you will excuse me, but this is no time for bad jokes."

"Mr. Harcourt, you will learn later on that the joke in this business is not of my making, and I hope to make the joker pay for it. Meanwhile, I come from Mr. Ophir."

"You said that before."

"Did I? Well, I say it again. I come from Mr. Ophir commissioned to find those diamonds, and I ask you, as civilly as may be, what has been done with the case?"

"What you yourself have done with it?"

"Well, what I myself have done with it, if you like."

Harcourt reddened with anger at this cool audacity, and Lilian suddenly interposed.

"You put it in your pocket, Mr. Beck, and carried it away."

"Was I in a hurry, miss?"

"You were in a great hurry."

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"Was I dressed as I am now?"

"Exactly."

"And looked the same?"

"Precisely."

"Figure and face the same?"

"Well, yes. I thought you were more made up than you are now."

"Made up! What do you mean, miss?"

"Well, Mr. Beck, I thought you had been beautifying yourself. There was a trace of rouge on your cheeks."

"And I kept my back to the light, I warrant."

"Your memory is wonderful."

Mr. Beck chuckled, and Harcourt broke in angrily —

"Don't you think we've had enough of this foolery, sir?"

"More than enough," said Mr. Beck, calmly. "I have the honor to wish you a very good morning, Mr. Harcourt, and to you, miss." There was a touch of admiration in his voice as he addressed Miss Lilian.

"Oh, Syd!" she cried, as the door closed behind him, "isn't it just thrilling! There never was such a mixed-up mystery. I do wonder which is the right Mr. Beck."

"Which! What in the world do you mean? I was dizzy enough without that. Of course they are both the right Mr. Beck, or the wrong Mr. Beck, whichever you please. They are both the same Mr. Beck anyhow."

Meanwhile Mr. Beck is driving as fast as a hansom can carry him back to Mr. Ophir's establishment, in Bond Street.

He found the eminent jeweler in his little glass citadel at the back of his glittering warehouse. A thrill of excitement disturbed his usual stately dignity.

"Well?" he said, when Mr. Beck stepped into the little glass room, closing the door carefully behind him.

"Well," responded the detective, "I think I have got a clue. I can make a fair guess who has the diamonds."

"Mr. Harcourt was rather a wild young man before this engagement," said Mr. Ophir, smiling an embarrassed tentative smile.

"Who made the new case for you?" said Mr. Beck, changing the subject with unceremonious abruptness.

"Hem — ah — Mr. Smithson, one of the most competent and reliable men in the trade. He has done all our work for the last twenty years. It was a very finely finished case indeed."

"Who brought it here?"

"One of Mr. Smithson's workmen."

"I think you told me this man saw you put the diamonds into the case, and seal them up for Mr. Harcourt?"

"Yes. He was standing only a few yards off at the time. There were two of my own men standing close by also, if you would care to examine them. Brown, will you kindly tell Mr. Carton and Mr. Cuison to step this way for a moment?"

"Never mind," said Mr. Beck, with a sharp authority in his voice. "Thank you, Mr. Ophir, I don't want to see them just yet. But I will trouble you for Mr. Smithson's address, if you please. I have an idea his man would

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be useful, if we could lay our hands on him."

"I don't think so, Mr. Beck; I don't think so at all. He was quite a common person. My own men will be much more satisfactory witnesses. Besides, you may have some trouble in finding him. Though of that, of course, I know nothing whatever."

The detective looked at him curiously for a moment. He had grown quite flushed and excited.

"Many thanks for your advice, Mr. Ophir," he said quietly; "but I think I will take my own way."

Twenty minutes afterwards the indefatigable Mr. Beck was at Mr. Smithson's workshop cross-examining the proprietor; but nothing came of it. The man who brought the case to Mr. Ophir's establishment was the man who made it. He was the best workman that Mr. Smithson ever had, though he only had him for ten days. His name was Mulligan. It sounded Irish, Mr. Smithson imagined, and he spoke like the man in Mr. Boucicault's play *The Shaughraun*. But whether he was Irish or Dutch, he was a right good workman. Of that Mr. Smithson was quite certain. He seemed hard up, and offered himself for very moderate wages. But before he was half an hour in the place he showed what he could do. So when the order came in for a case for the Harcourt diamonds Mr. Smithson set him on the job. He worked all day, took the case home with him, and brought it back the next morning, finished."

"I never saw a job done so well or so quick before," concluded Mr. Smithson out of breath.

"But how did he manage at home. You surely did not let him take the diamonds home with him?"

"Bless you," cried Mr. Smithson briskly, with a look of surprise at the great detective's innocent, imperturbable face, "he never saw the diamonds, and never will."

"Then how did he make the case to fit them?"

"We had a model — the old case."

"Have you got it still?"

For the first time there was a gleam of interest on Mr. Beck's face as he asked the question.

"Yes, I think it is somewhere about. Excuse me for a moment."

He returned with a rubbed and faded jewel-case covered with what had once been dark green morocco. Inside, the white velvet had grown yellow with age.

"That was our model, Mr. Beck. You see in the raised centre a place for the great star. The necklet ran round this slope."

"I see," said Mr. Beck, and for a quiet man he managed to get a lot of meaning into those two simple words. Then, after a pause: "You can let me have this old case, I suppose?"

"Certainly. Mr. Ophir's instructions are sufficient."

"By the way, Mr. Smithson," he said, carelessly, "did Mr. Mulligan — I think you said that was his name — say anything about Mr. Ophir?"

"Well, now, Mr. Beck, now that

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you mention it, he did. When he came first he asked me did I not do work for Mr. Ophir, and seemed anxious about it, I thought. He was very strong in his praise of Mr. Ophir. He said he thought he could get a recommendation from him if I wanted it, but I didn't. His work was recommendation enough for me. That's my way of doing business."

Mr. Beck put the case in his coat-tail pocket, and moved towards the door. He paused on the threshold.

"Good-day, Mr. Smithson," said Mr. Beck. "Mr. Mulligan did not turn up in the afternoon, I suppose?"

"Now how did you guess that, Mr. Beck. He did not. I gave him something extra for the way the thing was done and I fear he may have been indulging. But how did you guess it?"

"From something Mr. Ophir said to me," replied Mr. Beck.

"But he is coming back in the morning. I have promised him double wages. You see, I took him as it were on trial first. He will be here at eight o'clock tomorrow. I can give you his address if you want him meanwhile."

"Thanks. I fear it would not be of much use to me. I fancy I will find him when I want him, perhaps before you do. Good-day again, Mr. Smithson. By the way, I would not advise you to count too securely on Mr. Mulligan's return tomorrow morning."

Mr. Beck had dismissed his hansom when he went into Mr. Smithson's. He was only a few streets from the Strand, and he now walked very slowly in that direction, almost getting run over at the crossing between New Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road, so absorbed was he in a brown study.

"He's my man," he said to himself. "He must help whether he likes it or not. It won't be the first time he has given me a lift, though never before in such a big thing as this. By George, he is a clever one! The devil himself is a dunce in comparison. What a success he would be if he had joined our profession, though I suppose he thinks he is better off as he is. I doubt it though. He would be the first detective of the century. Well, no one can say I'm jealous. If he helps me to unravel this business I'll take care he gets his share of the credit."

Mr. Beck laughed to himself as if he had made rather a good joke, and stopped abruptly as he glanced at a church clock.

"Four o'clock," he muttered. "How fast the day has gone by! Four is his hour, and I have no time to lose. I suppose I'll find him at the old spot"; and he set off at a double-quick pace, five miles an hour at least, without appearance of effort, in the direction of Simpson's restaurant in the Strand.

Just a word about the man he was going to meet. M. Grabeau was at this time the cleverest and most popular drawing-room entertainer in London. He was a somewhat shy man, and could neither sing nor talk much in public. But for all that he was a veritable variety show in himself. He was a marvellous mimic and ventriloquist, a quick-change artist, but above

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all, a conjuror. He could maneuvre a pack of cards as a captain his company. They were animated and intelligent beings in his hands, obedient to his word of command.

In the construction and manufacture of mechanical tricks and toys he was possessed of a skill and ingenuity almost beyond belief. He had himself devised and constructed, with Mr. Edison's permission, a doll, with a phonograph in her interior, which imitated nature with almost absolute perfection, and sang "Home, Sweet Home," not merely with the voice, but with the manner and gesture of one of the most popular singers on the concert stage. Indeed, there were malicious persons (rivals, for the most part) who insisted that the voice and gesture of the imitation singer were less wooden than the real.

Mr. Beck had met M. Grabeau at some of those social functions where the introduction of a detective, either as a footman or a musician, had been thought a prudent precaution, and the acquaintance between them had ripened into companionship, if not friendship. Mr. Beck's profession had an intense attraction for the Frenchman, who knew all Gaboriau's novels by heart.

"They are so clevaire," he would say, with much gesticulation, to the stolid Mr. Beck; "they are too clevaire. The tangle in the commencement is superb. But what you call the unravel is not so good; the knots do not come undone so ——"

Then he would hold up a string tied in a very kink of hard knots, and show it a moment later clean and smooth. It was one of his tricks.

"But the life of the detective, the real detective you will observe, it is charming. It is beyond the hunt of the fox. It is the hunt of the man. The clevaire man who runs, and what you call doubles, and hides and fights too, sometime. It is glorious; it is life."

"Going to waste," Mr. Beck would mutter disconsolately after one of these interviews, when the Frenchman would spy out and pick up an almost invisible clue. "Going to waste. He would make one of the best detectives in the service, and he fiddles away his time at play-acting and trinket-selling and money-making." So Mr. Beck would shake his head over this melancholy instance of misplaced genius.

Naturally, when Mr. Beck got tangled over the vanishing-diamond puzzle, he was anxious to consult his friend, M. Grabeau.

"I hope he's here," said Mr. Beck to himself, as he entered Simpson's restaurant.

One look round relieved his mind on that score. M. Grabeau was there at his accustomed place at a corner table, at his accustomed dinner — a plate of roast beef underdone. For M. Grabeau affected English dishes and English cookery, and liked the honest, substantial fare of Simpson's.

A stout, good-humored man was M. Grabeau, with a quick eye, a close-cropped, shiny black head, blue eyes, and a smooth, cream-colored face.

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He noticed Mr. Beck the moment he entered the room, and put down the evening paper on which a moment before he was intent.

"Hullo!" he cried out, pleasantly, "that is you? *Bon-soir*, Monsieur Beck. I hope that you carry yourself well?"

It was noticeable about M. Grabeau that, though he could mimic any voice perfectly, when he spoke as M. Grabeau he spoke with a strong French accent, and interlarded his sentences with scraps of French.

Mr. Beck nodded, hung up his hat, and seated himself.

"Boiled mutton," he said to the waiter, "and a pint of stout."

"The fact is, monsieur," he went on in much the same tone, when the waiter whisked away to execute his order, "I wanted a word with you."

"Ah-hah! I know," said the other, vivaciously. "It's the Harcourt diamonds that have come to you, is it not? The wonderful diamonds of which one talked all the evening at the Harcourt reception. They have disappeared, and his lordship has employed M. Beck, the great detective. I thought you would come to me. It's all here," and he handed him across the table the *Westminster*, with his finger on a prominent paragraph headed in big, black letters:

"THE VANISHING DIAMONDS."

Mr. Beck read it through carefully.

Quite a sensation has been created in fashionable London by the sudden disappearance — it would, perhaps, be premature to say robbery — of the famous "Harcourt Heirloom," perhaps, after the Crown Jewels, the most famous and valuable diamonds in London. Our representative learned from the eminent jeweler, Mr. Ophir, of Bond Street, that he had with his own hands this morning put the jewels into a case, sealed up the parcel and handed it to the Hon. Mr. Sydney Harcourt. Mr. Harcourt, on the other hand, states that when the case was opened in his presence by his *fiancée*, Miss Ray — for whom the jewels were meant as a wedding present — it was empty. If Mr. Ophir and the Hon. Sydney Harcourt both speak the truth — and we have no reason to doubt either, or both — the diamonds must have vanished through the case and brown paper in the hansom cab *en route* between Bond Street and Upper Belgrave Street. We need not say that in position and respectability Mr. Ophir stands at the very head of his business, and the Hon. Sydney Harcourt, though he ran loose for awhile on the race-course, contracted no serious pecuniary obligations of which the world knows; and his rank, character, and position should protect him from even the smallest taint of suspicion. All these circumstances, of course, heighten the mystery. We understand that the famous detective, Mr. Beck, at the instance of Mr. Ophir, called later on at Upper Belgrave Street. He has a clue as a matter of course. A clue is one of those things that no well-regulated detective is ever without.

M. Grabeau watched Mr. Beck eagerly, reading his face as he read the paper.

"Well," he asked impatiently, when Mr. Beck at length came to an end, "it is all right there?"

"Pretty accurate for a newspaper reporter!"

"And you have got the clue — you, the famous detective."

There was sometimes the faintest suggestion of contempt, a vague hint

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at a sneer, in M. Grabeau's tone as he talked to Mr. Beck, which Mr. Beck never appeared to resent or even notice in the least.

"Well, yes, monsieur, I think I have a bit of a clue. But I came to hear your notion of the business. I have an idea that you are the man to put me on the right track. It would not be the first time, you know."

Monsieur beamed at the rough compliment. "You must first tell me all — everything."

Mr. Beck told him all — everything — with admirable candor, not forgetting the doubling of his own character at Belgrave Street.

"Well," he said at last, "what do you think, monsieur?"

"Mr. Ophir," said M. Grabeau shortly, and closed his mouth sharply with a snap like a trap.

"No," cried Mr. Beck, in a tone of surprise and admiration. "You don't say so! You don't think, then, there is any truth in the hint in the paper that young Harcourt himself made away with the stones to pay some gambling debts?"

"No, my friend, believe me. He of them knows nothing more than he has said. It was not what you call the worth of his while. His father, he is rich; his lady, she is beautiful. I have seen her. Respectable Mr. Ophir gives to him the jewels. The risk is too great, even if he have debts, which is not proved."

"But how did Mr. Ophir get them out of the case?"

"He did not even put them in."

"I thought I told you that three people saw him put them in — two of his own men and the messenger, a Mr. Mulligan, who came from the case-maker."

"That messenger — you have seen him then?"

"Well, no. He had not come back to his place of employment when I called."

"And he will never come. He has vanished. M. Ophir perhaps could tell where he has vanished, but he will not tell you, believe it well."

"But the other two men saw the jewels packed. There were two others besides the messenger."

"*Hélas!* my great detective, are you not a little — I will not say stupid — a little innocent today? You will not think harm of M. Ophir. *Très bien.* But that which you object, it is so simple. Give me for a moment your watch and chain."

He leaned across the table, and as if by magic Mr. Beck's watch and chain were in his hands — a heavy gold watch with a heavy gold chain that fitted to the waistcoat buttonhole with a gold bar.

"Now observe; this will be our case." With rapid, dexterous fingers he fashioned the copy of the *Westminster Gazette* into the semblance of a jewel-case with a closely fitting lid. He opened the box wide, put the watch and chain in, so that Mr. Beck could see it plainly inside, and closed the lid with two fingers only.

"There was no deception."

He pushed the box across the table-

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cloth to Mr. Beck, who opened it and found it empty. The wide eyes and bland smile of the detective expressed his astonishment.

"But where has it gone to?" he cried.

"Behold, it is there," said M. Grabeau, tapping him on the capacious waistcoat.

The watch was comfortably back in Mr. Beck's waistcoat pocket, for which, by the way, it was a pretty tight fit, and the gold bar of the chain was again securely fastened in his waistcoat buttonhole.

"I could have sworn I saw you put it into the case and leave it there."

"*Eh bien!* So could the men of this M. Ophir of whom you speak. I put it in your pocket, he put it in his own. Behold all the difference. His plan was, oh! so much easier."

"But, monsieur, M. Ophir has the name of a most decent and respectable man."

M. Grabeau snapped his fingers in contemptuous anger. "This man," he said, "I know him, I have had what you call shufflings — dealings — with him. He is cold, but he is cunning. He called me — me, Alphonse Grabeau — one cheat. Now I, Alphonse Grabeau, call him, M. Ophir, one thief, and I will prove it. He has stolen the diamonds. I will help you, my friend, to run him up."

"I am much obliged, monsieur. I rather thought from the first you could give me a lift in this case. Where can I see you tomorrow if I have anything to say to you?"

"I will be in my leetle establishment until two hours of the afternoon. At four I will be here at my dinner. In the evening I will be in the saloon of the Duke of Doubleditch. At any time I will be glad to talk to you of this case — of this M. Ophir, the thief. But you must be punctual, for I am a man of the minute."

"Quite sure you are going to the Duke's in the evening?"

"It is equally certain as a musket."

"Oh, very well, if I don't see you at the shop I will see you at dinner."

M. Grabeau drained the last drops of his glass of whisky-and-water, picked up his cane and hat and gloves.

Mr. Beck rose at the same moment.

"Good evening, monsieur," he said admiringly, "I must shake hands with you if it was to be the last time. I always thought you were almighty clever, but I never rightly knew how clever you are until tonight. It is a thundering pity that ——"

"What?" asked M. Grabeau sharply, for Mr. Beck paused in the very middle of his sentence.

"That you are not one of us; that your talents didn't get fair play and full scope in the right direction."

M. Grabeau beamed at the compliment, and went out beaming.

Mr. Beck called for a second helping of boiled mutton, and ate it slowly. His face and manner were more vacuous than ever.

Something of special importance must plainly have detained Mr. Beck, for it was a quarter past two next day

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when he walked with a quick, swinging step up to the "leetle establishment" of M. Grabeau, in Wardour Street. He paused for one moment before the window where all sorts of ingenious and precious knickknacks and trifles were temptingly arranged, then walked into the shop.

There was a young man of about nineteen years alone behind the counter; a young man with a long nose, very fleshy at the top, and an unwholesome complexion, and a pair of beady black eyes.

"Good day, Jacob," said Mr. Beck. "Master out?"

"Just gone a quarter of an hour ago."

"Coming back?"

"Not this evening."

"Oh, well, I'll see him later on. By the way, Jacob, that's a new thing you have got. The coral necklet and brooch there in the window. Will you let me have a peep at it?"

Jacob took the case from the window and set it on the counter. The set was a fine specimen of carved coral linked with fine gold, in a case of faded brown morocco and dingy white velvet that looked as old as themselves.

Mr. Beck inspected the trinkets carefully for a full five minutes with intent admiration, turning the case round several times to get a better view. He seemed much interested in a smear of what looked like damp gum on the edge of the leather.

"What's the damage, Jacob?" he asked at last.

"Not for sale, sir. Master cautioned me four different times — not for sale, no matter what price I might be offered. Not likely to be tempted much, I should say; there is not half a sovereign's worth of gold in the lot."

"Ah!" said Mr. Beck meditatively. Then persuasively: "Well, it is not so much the red affairs I want as the box they are in. My aunt desired me to get her one for a brooch and necklace she picked up cheap at a sale, and this would about do. You were not forbidden to sell the box, were you, Jacob? It doesn't seem to fit these things as if it were made for them, does it?"

"It fits them most beautifully, Mr. Beck. But there, don't go. I don't say I won't sell it to oblige a friend of the master, if I get a fair price for it."

"What do you call a fair price?"

"What would you say to a sovereign now?"

Mr. Beck said nothing to a sovereign. He said nothing at all. But he produced the coin in question from his waistcoat pocket and placed it on the counter, turned the contents of the case out in a jingling heap, put the case itself in his pocket, and walked out of the shop.

Mr. Beck let himself in with a latchkey, and walked noiselessly upstairs to his own pretty little sitting-room on the drawing-room floor. He took the old case from his pocket and set it beside another old case — the one he got from Mr. Smithson — on the round table in the centre of the

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room. There were flowers on the table, and Mr. Beck sniffed their fragrance approvingly; he seemed on this particular afternoon to be pleased with everything.

The two cases were alike, though not identical in form; he opened them. Inside, the shape was almost precisely the same. Mr. Beck gave a short assenting nod at them, as if he was nodding approval of something he had just said himself. Then he walked to the door, closed it softly, and turned the key in the lock. Anyone with an eye to the keyhole — such an eye as Sam Weller graphically described in the witness-box — might have seen Mr. Beck drop into an easy-chair with one of the two cases in his hand, turning it slowly round and round with that look, puzzled yet confident, which so many people wore when that delightful problem "Pigs in Clover" was the rage.

A little later anyone with an ear to the keyhole might have heard Mr. Beck draw a deep breath of relief, and chuckle quietly to himself; then, if the ear was preternaturally acute, might have heard him lock something in his own pet patent-safe which stood in a neat overcoat of mahogany in a corner of the room.

"Oh! how can people be so mean?" cried Lilian Ray, in a voice that quivered with indignation.

She was standing in the middle of her own drawing-room, and the tattered fragments of the "extra special" edition of the *Evening Talebearer* fluttered round her like a pink snowstorm. She stamped on the bits of paper with angry little feet.

"Easy, Lil, easy!" cried Harcourt from the sofa where he sat, a gloomy look on his handsome face. "Take it quietly, my pet. It's the nature of the beasts. Besides, it's true enough — most of it. I have been as they say, 'a wild young scamp.' 'No one knows the amount of my debts' — because there aren't any. 'Mr. Ophir is a gentleman of unimpeachable respectability.' 'This is a most unpleasant mystery for the Hon. Sydney Harcourt.' There's no denying that's true, anyway."

"I wonder at you, Syd — you, a great strong man, to sit there quietly and hear such things said!" She turned on him sharply, her blue eyes very bright behind the unshed tears.

"But I haven't heard them, Lil."

"Oh, well, you know what I mean. Why don't you stamp this thing out, and teach those vile slanderers a lesson they would never forget? Why don't you go straight to their low den, wherever it is, and — and — oh, how I wish I were a man!"

"Glad you're not, Lil, for my sake," he answered, in a tone that brought the quick blood to her cheek.

She ran to him impetuously, and played with his curls as she bent caressingly over him. "My poor boy, I am so sorry to see you worried."

A sharp knock came to the door, and Lilian was sitting on the sofa, and at the extreme end of it, panting

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a little, when the footman entered.

"Mr. Beck, sir," said the footman.

"Show him in. What does the fellow want now, I wonder?"

"I won't detain you a moment, Mr. Harcourt," said the imperturbable Mr. Beck, walking quietly into the room.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Beck," stammered Harcourt. "I did not know; that is to say, I was engaged."

"So I see, sir," said Mr. Beck drily. "But I think the young lady will spare a moment or two for what I have to say and to show."

"You have a clue, then?"

"Well, yes, I think I may say I have a clue."

He took from his coat-tail pocket the old jewel-case which he had purchased for a sovereign, and set it on the table, pushing aside some costly trifles to make place for it.

"You see this, miss. Is it at all like the case that came with the diamonds?"

"The case that came without the diamonds you mean, Mr. Beck," said Lilian smiling. "It is just like it in shape, but the other was quite new and shining."

"That is a detail, miss. A clever hand could make that little change from new to old in half an hour. Now will you kindly open it?"

As Lilian opened it she thrilled with the sudden unreasonable notion that the diamonds might be inside. But it was quite empty; faded and empty.

"The inside is just the same, too," she said, "only this is so faded. Anything else, Mr. Beck?"

"Would you oblige me by taking the case in your hands for one moment. No, don't close it. Now will you kindly put your thumb here, and your other thumb here on the opposite side?"

Mr. Beck guided the slender little thumbs to their places while Harcourt looked on in amazement.

"Now, miss, kindly squeeze both together."

Lilian gave a quick, sharp gasp of delight and surprise. For suddenly, as if by magic, there blazed on the slope of faded velvet a great circle of flashing diamonds with a star of surpassing splendor in the centre.

"Oh! oh! oh!" she cried breathlessly. "They are too beautiful for anyone! Oh, Syd," turning to her lover with eyes brighter than the jewels, "did you ever see anything so beautiful? They dazzle my eyes and my mind together. I cannot look at them any longer," and she closed the case with a snap, and turning to the placid detective: "Oh, how clever you were to find them, Mr. Beck; wasn't he, Syd? Do tell us how and where and when you managed it?"

She so bubbled over with delight and admiration and gratitude that even the detective was captivated. He beamed like a full moon and bowed with the easy grace of a bear.

"Will you open the case again, miss," was all he said. She raised the lid and was struck dumb with blank amazement.

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The case was empty.

"A trick case," said Harcourt, after a pause.

"Just so, sir, that's the whole story in three words. About as neat a bit of work as ever came out of human hands. No wonder. Twenty thousand pounds, more or less, was the price the maker wanted for it. The closing of the case works the spring, as you see, sir. That's the notion of it, and not a bad notion either."

"And the diamonds are safe inside," cried Lilian; "they were there all the time, and I have only to squeeze with my thumbs and they will come out again. It's wonderful! Wonderful! I declare I like the case as much as the jewels. I hope the maker will be well paid, Mr. Beck."

"He'll be well paid, miss, never you fear," said Mr. Beck, a little grimly, "though not perhaps in the coin he expected."

"But however did you find it out? You must be most wonderfully clever. I suppose you have worked up some marvellous system that nobody can understand but yourself."

Mr. Beck actually blushed under this shower of compliments.

"A little common sense, miss, that's all. I have no more system than the hound that gets on the fox's scent and keeps on it. I just go by the rule of thumb, and muddle and puzzle out my cases as best I can."

"When did you guess the diamonds were in the case?" said Harcourt.

"I guessed it, sir, when I saw Mr. Ophir, and I was sure of it when I saw you. You see how it is, sir; if Mr. Ophir put the diamonds into the case and no one took them out, it stood to reason they were still there — whatever might be the appearance to the contrary!"

"It sounds quite simple," murmured Lilian, "when you are told it."

"Of course, when I found my double had been for the case, it made certainty doubly certain."

"Your double! Then you were right, Lilian; there were two Mr. Becks."

"Of course; I am always right."

"Might I ask, sir," continued Harcourt, "which you are?"

"He's the second Mr. Beck, of course, Syd. How can you be so silly? But I want to know where is the first Mr. Beck, the man with the beautiful hands?"

"The first Mr. Beck, miss, otherwise Mulligan, otherwise Monsieur Grabeau, is in jail at present, awaiting his trial. He was arrested this afternoon by appointment at Simpson's restaurant by the second Mr. Beck."

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MURDER IN ONE SCENE

by Q. PATRICK

Lieutenant Trant of the New York Homicide Bureau was dawdling over his breakfast in his pleasant apartment. He buttered a piece of brioche and glanced at the three letters in the mail.

They didn't look interesting. One was from his mother in Newport. He opened it and read Mrs. Trant's usual garrulous account of her social life with its usual undercurrent of pained surprise that her son should choose to be a New York policeman pursuing murderers when he might be escorting the toniest dowagers through the best drawing rooms of the Eastern Seaboard.

The second letter came from a Princeton classmate who was starting a cultured magazine and thought Trant might like to sacrifice five hundred dollars on the altar of Art.

The third was even less promising. The long envelope bore his name and address in type and on its left hand top corner the printed words: *Big Pal.* Trant knew the organization. It was a worthy one which found sponsors for delinquent boys on parole. Lieutenant Trant slit the envelope, anticipating the printed plea beginning: *Dear Friend . . .*

But the envelope did not contain the usual form letter. Inside was a folded sheet of elegant blue stationery. Lieutenant Trant blinked. He unfolded the sheet and looked at what was written on it. He blinked again.

Beneath an embossed Park Avenue address had been written in a round feminine hand:

Dear George:
Since you insist, come at five tomorrow. But this is to warn you. I shall have Eddie there. I have also bought a gun. If you try what you tried last time, I will use it.

Marna

Lieutenant Trant, whose passion for the unorthodox was unbridled, smiled happily. Offhand he could think of nothing less orthodox than the arrival of so personal and interesting a communication in the envelope of an impersonal and unexciting charitable organization.

He realized that a mistake must have been made with envelopes. Appeals are usually sent out by volunteer ladies who have been given a "sucker" list and envelopes and who salve their social consciences by typing addresses and providing stamps. This particular volunteer lady — this unknown Marna — must have been very absent-minded or very jittery.

Judging by the nature of the letter

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she had mailed in the wrong envelope, she had been very jittery.

Trant looked at the date. It had been written the day before. "Five tomorrow" therefore meant five o'clock that afternoon. He let his thoughts toy pleasingly with a picture of the jittery Marna with her gun and Eddie waiting at five for the mysterious George who might "try" again what he had "tried" last time.

It was, of course, his duty as an officer of the law to investigate.

He put the envelope and the letter in his pocket.

He was humming as he left his apartment.

A few minutes before five Lieutenant Trant, in an elegantly inconspicuous gray suit, arrived at the house whose address appeared at the head of Marna's letter. Although the house had a Park Avenue number, its door was on a side street. It was an old private residence which had been converted into apartments.

Since he did not know Marna's name, he stepped into the small outside hall and studied the names above the door buzzers. There was no Marna anything. Most of the names were discouraging. But above the buzzer of the penthouse apartment were two printed cards. One said: *Miss Joan Hyde.* The other said: *Mrs. George Hyde.*

Marna could be Mrs. George Hyde. That would make her the wife of the potentially sinister George. Miss Joan Hyde might be her daughter. Lieutenant Trant was disappointed. Romantic about mystery and the possibly mysterious, he had imagined Marna blonde, beautiful — and young.

He was about to press the Hyde buzzer when a girl came in from the street behind him and, fumbling through her pocketbook, brought out a key and opened the door. She glanced at him questioningly and kept the door half open. He smiled and followed her into the house.

The girl had started through the neat mirrored hallway toward a self-service elevator, but she stopped and turned back to him a little suspiciously.

"Are you looking for someone?"

She was young and pretty with shining dark hair, cool eyes, and a sort of lazy self-assurance which went with the silver fox coat.

How nice, thought Lieutenant Trant, if Marna had looked like that.

He said: "As a matter of fact, I'm looking for Marna Hyde."

"Oh." She smiled. "How interesting."

"Is it?"

"To me it is." She moved to the elevator. "I'll take you up."

Lieutenant Trant got into the elevator too. The girl's perfume was pleasant. As she made the elevator ascend, she glanced at him sidewise.

"Don't say Marna's got herself a new beau."

"Do I look like a beau?"

"Very. But I wouldn't have thought Marna'd have the energy to take on

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a new man — what with George to get rid of and the faithful Eddie hovering."

So far so good, thought Lieutenant Trant.

The elevator reached the top floor. They got out to face a single door. The girl started to fumble in her pocketbook again.

"So you live here too," said Trant.

"I moved in when George moved out. I'm a bodyguard. Hasn't Marna mentioned me? I'm Joan."

"George's sister."

"Yes."

"And you're not on George's side?"

"About the divorce?" Joan Hyde turned. "Are you kidding?"

"I never kid," said Lieutenant Trant. "I am a very sedate young man."

Joan Hyde had found the key. "I don't imagine Marna's home yet but come in and have a drink."

"I'd like to very much."

She opened the door, chattering: "I've just been to that French movie with Barrault and Arletty. It's quite wonderful, but at the beginning I never dreamed he wouldn't get her at the end. Why are foreign movies always so gloomy?"

Trant followed her into a charmingly casual living-room. His trained eye saw several very valuable pieces.

Joan Hyde said: "It's nothing much. They wanted a hangout in New York and Marna brought up some of the junk from their Long Island attic. I'll rustle up a drink. Sit down."

As the girl disappeared into the kitchen, Trant moved to a small Chippendale breakfront desk, reflecting that anyone who had "junk" like this in a Long Island attic had no financial problems. On the desk he saw what he hoped he would see. Beside a portable typewriter there were a pile of unused *Big Pal* envelopes; a pile of form letters; a mimeographed list of addresses; and a second neat pile of letters which had been addressed on the typewriter and stamped ready for mailing.

He glanced at the name on the top and saw that a Mr. and Mrs. LeRoy Jones of 78th Street were about to be urged to take an interest in delinquent boys. He had just enough time to glance at the letter below which was for a Mrs. Samuel Katzenbach when he heard Joan returning; he dropped into a chair.

"I'm afraid there's only rye." Joan Hyde appeared with a tray. "After having put up with George for so long, Marna and I are a little cautious about alcohol." She put the tray down and glanced at him curiously. "I suppose you do know what I'm talking about? You're not someone who's come to look at the plumbing, are you?"

"I was never good with my hands," said Lieutenant Trant.

Joan made drinks and chattered on. As Trant listened, the situation became increasingly clear. Marna had married George. George was a drunk. Marna had met Eddie. Marna had wanted a divorce. The drunken George had made terrible scenes; at

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one time he had drunkenly tried to kill Marna. Joan, entirely in sympathy with her sister-in-law, had moved in as protection.

"It's dreary," meditated Joan. "You can't help feeling fond of your own brother, but George is quite frightening. And he still has a key. I'm always telling Marna she should get the lock changed. But she's always putting it off."

Trant was losing interest. In spite of the fascinating accident which had made him conscious of it, this was basically a trite situation. A wealthy alcoholic with a temper; probably a frivolous wife.

His thought-train snapped because a noise had come from the room, presumably a bedroom, behind Joan. It was a very slight sound but enough to tell him someone was there.

He glanced at his watch. "Five fifteen. Marna made a fuss about my being on time. You don't suppose she's in the bedroom? Maybe asleep?"

Joan put her drink down. "I strenuously doubt it. Want me to look?"

"Would you?"

A newspaper lay on the arm of Trant's chair. To feign indifference he picked it up and glanced at it. It had been turned to a review of the opening of the circus. He looked down the columns.

Joan Hyde reached the bedroom door. She opened it. She gasped.

"Marna!"

Instantly Trant ran to her side. Oblivious of him, Joan took a step into the room. Trant followed. A blonde girl in a black dress sat on one of the twin beds. Her hair tumbled in disorder around her beautiful but stricken face. Fantastically, she was wearing white suede gloves, and over the knuckles of the right-hand glove stretched a red damp stain.

Joan ran to her. "Marna, what's the matter?"

Trant gazed as if hypnotized at the red stain. Marna turned to look at him from blank eyes.

"Joan, tell that man to go."

"But, Marna, he has a date with you."

"Tell him to go away."

Trant took a step forward, his eyes darting about the room. He passed the foot of the bed.

Marna jumped up and screamed: "No, no."

He came to the second bed. He looked down at the area of carpet between the bed and the window. Sprawled face down was the body of a young man. A revolver lay on the floor close to him.

The back of his head had been shot away. He was dead. There was no doubt about that.

Joan came running to Trant's side. "George!" she cried. "Oh, Marna, he tried to attack you again. He . . ."

Trant turned to Marna Hyde. She stood quite still, the fair hair hanging to her shoulders. She was as lovely as he could have wanted her to be.

Rather sadly he said: "Since you bought the gun, Mrs. Hyde, I suppose you felt you should get your money's worth."

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Both girls were staring at him.

He added: "By the way, do you always wear gloves in the house?"

"She has a milk allergy." It was Joan who spoke. "Her hands broke out again this afternoon. She always wears gloves when it's bad. But — who are you? Why are you here?"

Trant shrugged. "I'm sorry to give you such good service. I'm from the Homicide Bureau." He took Marna's elbow. "Shall we move into the next room?"

Marna let him guide her into the living-room. She dropped into a chair. Joan Hyde came after them.

"Homicide Bureau. I don't understand."

"You're not meant to." Trant was watching Marna. "You have been sending out appeals for the *Big Pal* people, haven't you?"

The girl shivered. She did not seem to have heard the question. He repeated it. She whispered:

"Yes."

"You sent some off yesterday and some more today?"

"Yes."

Trant took from his pocket the letter he had received and handed it to her.

"You wrote this, Mrs. Hyde?"

"Yes, but how . . . ?"

"It's all fairly obvious, isn't it? Your husband didn't want the divorce. He'd been acting violently. He was coming at five. You were afraid of him, so you bought a gun. He got violent again. You shot him."

Marna Hyde did not say anything.

Trant went on: "There's just one thing that seems to be missing. Eddie was supposed to be here. Where is he?"

Marna was looking at the bloodstain on her glove. There was dead silence. The buzzer shrilled. Joan started for the door; but Trant outdistanced her to the hall. He opened the door onto a blond young man with broad shoulders and very blue eyes.

Trant said: "Hello, Eddie."

The young man glared. "Who are you?"

"Just a stray policeman. You're a little late for the murder."

"Murder? Nothing's — nothing's happened to Marna?"

Roughly the young man pushed past Trant and ran into the living-room. Trant followed. The young man hurried to Marna and dropped at her side, his face gaunt with anxiety.

"Marna, baby. Marna, are you all right?"

"It's George, Eddie," said Joan. "He's dead."

Marna turned so that she was looking straight at the young man. "Eddie, you didn't . . . ?" Slowly the expression of horror faded from her eyes. "No." She got up and confronted Trant. She seemed almost calm.

"I haven't any idea how you got here, but presumably you want to ask me questions. It's all quite simple. I did buy the gun. I did write George that letter. But that's all I did. I've been out this afternoon. I got back

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just before five. I went into the bedroom. I — I found George. I was still bending over him when I heard Joan come in with you. I heard a strange voice. It was all a terrible shock. I didn't want a stranger involved. I decided to wait in the bedroom until you had gone."

Lieutenant Trant lit a cigarette. He was thinking hard. He enjoyed thinking hard and he discovered that he was beginning to relish this situation which, whatever it turned out to be, was no longer trite.

He sat down on the arm of a chair. All three of them were watching him as if he were a time bomb.

He glanced at Marna. "So that's your story. Your husband was dead when you came home?"

"It's true."

Trant smiled. "You would hardly admit that it was a lie, Mrs. Hyde. Of course, with those gloves, there'd be no fingerprints on the gun. You picked a lucky time for your disagreement with milk."

"Marna's milk allergy is on the level," barked Eddie. "Show him your hands, Marna."

Marna peeled off her right glove. There was no doubt about the allergy. Her thumb, the tips of her second and first fingers, and the whole middle of her palm were sprinkled with little white blisters. She turned the hand over. Her knuckles were split. She put the glove on again.

Lieutenant Trant looked apologetic. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Hyde. I shouldn't have doubted your word." He eyed her almost with affection. "I might as well explain my presence. There's no magic involved. I'm on the *Big Pal* 'sucker' list. This morning I got what should have been the appeal. It wasn't. I got George's letter instead. I came to see what would happen here at five o'clock."

The drinks were still on the tray. Eddie poured himself a shot of straight rye.

"I thought," continued Trant, "that I had received the letter by mistake. That, of course, was what I was *supposed* to think. Unhappily, I don't think it any more."

Marna said: "What do you think?"

Trant did not reply. "When you're sending out appeals to people on an alphabetical list, the only way to do it without driving yourself crazy is to send them in alphabetical order."

"That's what I did."

"Exactly. Yesterday you got up to the I's. I took a look at your desk. Today you began with the J's and K's. My name's Trant. Certainly you hadn't got to the T's yesterday. You couldn't inadvertently have put George's letter in an envelope for me by yesterday."

Eddie asked: "Which means?"

"That the letter was sent to me by-mistake-on-purpose. Someone saw my name on the 'sucker' list and knew my reputation as a sort of crackpot policeman. They knew if I received the letter I'd be intrigued enough to show up here at five."

The two girls together asked: "But why?"

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"Because they wanted me to come. The letter would have given me a preconceived idea of motive. I would have found George's body and realized right away that he had attacked his wife and she had shot him in self-defense. I would have written George off as a victim of justifiable homicide. I might even have made a little speech to Mrs. Hyde about Valiant American Womanhood. Yes, it was a neat trap, a very neat trap."

Eddie asked belligerently: "Are you suggesting that Marna . . ."

"I'm not suggesting that Mrs. Hyde did anything at all." Trant looked at Eddie. "Do you have a key to this apartment?"

"Of course I don't."

"But you were hoping to marry Mrs. Hyde once she got the divorce?"

He flushed. "I was and I am."

Trant turned to Marna. "I imagine your husband was quite rich."

"He was very well off."

"Seems to have been a kind of irresponsible character. Didn't make the money himself, did he?"

"No. It's a trust. When his parents died, they left it all to him in trust. He can't touch the capital. Just the income."

Lieutenant Trant was still watching Marna. "Lucky accident my arrival coincided with your sister-in-law's, wasn't it? If I'd come a minute earlier, you wouldn't have let me in. If I'd arrived a minute later, you'd have told Joan what had happened, and again I wouldn't have been let in."

Marna did not reply.

Trant continued musingly: "I always rather suspect lucky accidents. They're not always as accidental as they seem."

He shifted his quiet attention to Joan Hyde. "You live here, Miss Hyde. Perhaps you saw Marna writing that letter to George yesterday. Perhaps you even offered to mail it."

Joan Hyde looked back at him blankly.

"I suppose," he went on in his soft, almost gentle voice, "you called George in Marna's name and asked him to come a little *before* five. After you'd killed him, you went downstairs, saw Marna come home, and waited for me. That was an ingenious device, assuming I was a beau of Marna's. It gave you a chance to sell me once and for all on the manslaughter set-up. The violent George, the unchanged lock . . ."

Her dark eyes blazing, Joan snapped: "You're mad."

Lieutenant Trant looked disappointed. "Why do murderers always say: *You're mad?* Do you suppose they pick it up in the movies?"

"You . . . !"

"In any case, I'm afraid the movies have been your downfall, Miss Hyde. You got just a little too chatty about your French film. You told me you never dreamed at the beginning that Barrault wouldn't get Arletty in the end. To be in doubt about the end of a movie at the beginning proves quite definitely that you saw the beginning first."

He picked up the newspaper from

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the arm of the chair. "That French movie happens to be playing at only one Manhattan house. I notice here in the time-table that it begins at 1:20, 3:20 and 5:20. Since you saw the beginning before the end you could not possibly have seen the 3:20 show and arrived here just before five. If you went to the movie at all today, you went to the show which was over just before three twenty. That gave you plenty of time to eliminate George." He paused. "That does horrid things to your alibi, doesn't it?"

Joan Hyde seemed stunned. So did Eddie and Marna.

Eddie asked: "But why would Joan . . . ?"

"Failing offspring, a trust fund reverts to the family." Trant's amiable gaze moved to Marna. "Am I right in assuming that Miss Hyde is the family?"

"Why, yes," faltered Marna. "She's the only other child. I suppose the trust goes to her."

"Money." Lieutenant Trant sighed. "Such an orthodox motive. Perhaps you'd give me the name of your husband's lawyer. Just to check."

He produced a pencil and a piece of paper. Marna took the pencil in her right hand and scribbled. Trant put the paper in his pocket. He was still watching Marna.

"When you discovered the corpse, you thought Eddie must have done it, didn't you? Once you'd realized no court would convict you, you'd almost certainly have taken the rap for his sake. Yes, it was quite an expert little scheme for disposing of an alcoholic brother and living happily ever after on his trust fund."

He turned to Joan Hyde.

She was still quite calm and her eyes were hard with anger. "You'll never prove it. Never."

Trant grinned. "You'll be surprised at what I can prove when I put my mind to it. For example, we've hardly scratched that milk allergy, have we?"

He turned to Marna. "Would you take off your glove again, please?"

The girl obeyed. Trant drew Joan toward her sister-in-law and carefully took hold of Marna's hand.

"Your sister-in-law wrote down the lawyer's name for me. See how the pressure of the pencil broke those little blisters? Blisters are very sensitive, Miss Hyde. I challenge even you to have fired a gun and kept your blisters intact." He shrugged. "Mrs. Hyde couldn't have fired the gun. Eddie, who didn't have a key, couldn't have got in. So . . . . Like me to do some more proving?"

Eddie was gazing at Marna's hand. He muttered: "For heaven's sake, he's proved it, Marna. And it took him less than ten minutes."

Trant had a firm hold on Joan Hyde's arm. He still liked her perfume.

"A really good detective," he said modestly, "would have solved it before it happened. It's too bad, Miss Hyde. If I'd been a little brighter, we might be going to the theater tonight, instead of to the Tombs . . . ."

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OFTEN DO THE SPIRITS STRIDE

Percival Wilde created P. Moran, the Mail Order Manhunter, especially for EQMM, and most of the misadventures of Mr. Wilde's Correspondence School Sleuth appeared in these pages before the great defective detective made his bow between covers — P. MORAN, OPERATIVE (*Random House, 1947*). *Had EQMM been in existence in the early 1920s, Mr. Wilde might have created one of his other criminological characters especially for us — Bill Parmelee, reformed cardsharp, a master at solving gambling mysteries and exposing cheaters. But the honor of introducing Bill Parmelee to the world fell to "The Popular Magazine," who decidedly knew a good thing when they read it . . . We asked Mr. Wilde to recall the circumstances under which Bill Parmelee was born. What gave Mr. Wilde the original idea for so original a character? Where did Mr. Wilde learn the lingo, discover the devices, garner the gimmicks?*

Mr. Wilde began to reminisce . . . There was a period in his life, he recalled, when he was a rabid bibliophile, haunting metropolitan auction rooms, buying large quantities of books for which at the time he seemed to have no particular use, and accumulating them so recklessly that in later years they almost drove him out of his own house. One afternoon, at Anderson's, a lot of seven books came up — Maskelyne's SHARPS AND FLATS, *Robert-Houdin's* CONFIDENCES D'UN PRESTIDIGITATEUR (*5 vols.*), *and a battered copy of Hoyle. In a hushed silence (resembling the silence which pervaded when, during prohibition days, Mr. Wilde was the highest bidder at an auction of cut-glass decanters) he threw caution to the winds and signaled "One dollar." To his amazement the hammer crashed down, and Mr. Wilde found himself the owner of seven books on the fine art of double-dealing, with antidotes.*

Often do the spirits stride on before the events. Maskelyne, Robert-Houdin, and Hoyle were those spirits. For mark the finger of Fate: some years afterward the late Charles Agnew MacLean asked Mr. Wilde, "How about a series of stories for 'Popular,' all around a central character?" The old auction purchase had been fermenting in his brain; it was like the popping of a cork when Mr. Wilde replied, "How about the character of a reformed cheat who unmasks other cheats?"

The four Horsemen of the Pasteboards rode hard after that — the Bug, the Clip, the Shiner, and the Holdout. After a sustained and successful session in "Popular" most of the cold-deck chronicles were published in

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book form — ROGUES IN CLOVER (Appleton, 1929). And although it is only twenty years since that book was issued, try and find a copy: a first edition of ROGUES IN CLOVER is a genuine rarity these days — we know collectors who have been seeking copies for more years than EQMM has been seeking fine stories out of the past for reprint.

All of which explains why we are so delighted to revive Bill Parmelee, the cardboard crime-buster, and bring back into print one of his so-hard-to-find tales-of-trimming.

Beware the dildock and his Devil's Picture Book, also known as the Child's Best Guide to the Gallows . . .

BEGINNER'S LUCK

by PERCIVAL WILDE

THE wind whistled down the chimney, and the birch logs blazing in the oldfashioned fireplace sent up ruddy bursts of flame.

Bill Parmelee, one-time gambler, would-be farmer, and now, despite his will, corrector of destinies and terror of his former associates, gazed happily into the fire and murmured, "Tony, old man, this is the life!"

Chance, which had once flung Bill into the ranks of the sharpers, which had allowed him, for six long years, to lead a precarious life by ingeniously circumventing rules made for the guidance of others, had had its revenge by picking him up and dropping him upon another square of the human chessboard. Wherefore Bill, reformed, and possessing an encyclopedic knowledge of the devices by whose aid games of chance may be made less risky for the person employing them, had become a most formidable antagonist of the shifty gentlemen who persisted in supplementing their natural skill by unostentatious sleight-of-hand.

There had been the case of Sutliffe, who, by the use of a little instrument known as a poker ring, had separated Tony Claghorn from his income quite as rapidly as it rolled in; and there had been the case of one Schwartz, who had relied chiefly upon the machine known as the Kepplinger holdout; and there had been the case of Floyd, whose roulette wheel had possessed almost human intelligence; and besides these there had been many others. But Bill, equipped with an unparalleled knowledge of cheating devices, and himself an expert in the art of legerdemain, had come, like an avenging angel, to the aid of honesty in distress, and had exposed the sharpers with what had seemed ridiculous ease. His

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innocent expression, his twinkling blue eyes, his youthful features, his countrified air had deluded his victims into a sense of false security; his career, as the champion of fair-play, had been a march from one success to another.

Yet Bill found little satisfaction in the role that had been forced upon him. Six years spent in the pursuit of fortune at cards, at roulette, at faro, at every gambling game to be found anywhere, had satisfied — more than satisfied — his every aspiration in that direction. Brought home by an accident, set upon a new track by another accident, he had turned to farming wholeheartedly — and had enjoyed it. In the beginning, doubtless, it was the novelty that had attracted him. But when the novelty had worn off he found himself engaged in an occupation which gave his intelligence almost unlimited scope. To make a blade of grass grow where none had grown before, to breed better cows and hogs, to contribute his share to the well-being of mankind: these were ambitions which were so intensely worthwhile that he was content to give himself up to them.

Even the winter evenings, when the windows were frosted over and the mercury shriveled up in the ball of the thermometer, were filled with satisfaction for Bill. With his aged father smoking his pipe and looking dreamily into the fire, and Tony Claghorn, his best friend, whom months of persuasion had finally induced to try a winter weekend in the country, at his side, Bill found himself filled with contentment.

"This is the life!" he repeated.

Tony, sitting so close to the fire that his clothing was in danger of bursting into flame, cast a glance through the window at the thickly falling snow. "And they called Peary a hero!" he murmured.

"What did you say?" Bill inquired.

"Miles and miles through snow and ice," raved Tony, "but he didn't have to go to the north pole for it. He could have gone to West Woods, Connecticut. By George! I never knew how much snow there was in the world."

John Parmelee smiled. "You should have been here thirty-six years ago, in the winter of 'eighty-eight. We had real snow that year. This," and he waved his hand at the flakes falling densely over the whitened meadows, "this is what we call an open winter."

Tony refused to be comforted. "Never — never in all my life did I expect to find so much cold weather — all in one place. It wouldn't be so bad if it were sprinkled here and there; if it would stop snowing for an hour or so, once in a while. But that's just the trouble with your Connecticut weather: once it's begun, it doesn't know when to leave off. It was cold when I got here; and it's been getting colder ever since; and the end doesn't seem to be in sight."

"If you wait until May ——" suggested Bill.

"I'll be frozen before then!"

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The crystalline tinkling of sleigh bells announced the belated arrival of the postman. Bill rose energetically. "Maybe the mail will cheer you up, Tony."

"More of the same kind?" inquired the New Yorker without turning his head.

"It looks like it."

With obvious disapproval Bill pawed over the half-dozen letters, tore them open, and glanced impatiently at their contents.

"Well?" murmured Tony.

Bill made a wry face. "Tony, old man, you've been advertising me too much. Here's a letter from Philadelphia: they want me to have a look at a roulette wheel. Here's another from New York: somebody who forgets to sign his name wants to know if I can tell him where to buy a hold-out. He doesn't want to use it to cheat, he says. He just wants to use it to make some experiments. Tony, do you get a mental picture of the experiments?"

Tony laughed. "What are the rest like?"

"A woman who uses violet-scented paper wonders if I could be induced to take part in a bridge game which she considers suspicious. She doesn't like to mention names, but she tells me in confidence that a prominent society woman is altogether too lucky with cards. She wouldn't accuse her of anything dishonest for the world — but what are my charges for investigating the case?"

"Go on," chuckled Tony.

Bill smoothed out a crumpled sheet.

"A young man — age eighteen, so he says — wants my expert opinion. Is it — or is it not — possible to cheat at checkers?"

Tony roared.

"Thanking me, and assuring me that he will be glad to reciprocate any time," concluded Bill, "he remains my very truly yours." Bill crumpled up the letter and flung it into the fire. "Now I ask you, how can you answer a question like that?"

"You've still got one left," said Tony, indicating an unopened letter.

"I'm not even going to read it," declared his harassed friend. "It goes into the fire."

"No! No!" exclaimed Tony.

"Why not?"

Tony snatched the letter, which Bill already had rolled up into a ball, and smoothed it tenderly on his knee. "Don't you see," he inquired, casting an eloquent glance at the falling snow, "that this letter comes from Florida?"

It was short and to the point.

> DEAR SIR: Do you know Pete Carney? Do you know his game? Will you come here and show it up? The other half of the enclosed will be waiting for you. Very truly,
>
> ALLAN GRAHAM.

The address was that of a famous east-coast hostelry; the inclosure, the half of a thousand-dollar note.

Tony whistled.

"Just look what I've saved from the fire! Why, this is real money."

"Not without the other half."

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"No; but think how easy it would be to get it."

Bill raised his eyebrows. "What makes you think that?"

"You've done it a dozen times, haven't you? You can do it again."

"Maybe — and maybe not."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing," Bill pointed out, "men named 'Pete' — not 'Peter' — are generally experts at games of chance."

"Are you joking?"

"It is barely possible that this man Carney — Pete Carney — might be so good that I wouldn't be able to carry out my contract."

Tony, with memories of episode after episode in which Bill had shown his ability to match his brains against those of sharpers, gazed at him incredulously.

"You don't really mean that?"

Bill nodded seriously. "You think I'm good because you've never seen me up against the real thing."

"How about Schwartz? And Sutliffe?"

"Pikers! Pikers!" Bill declared. "A child could have tripped them up just as easily as I did."

"How about Floyd and his electric roulette wheel?"

"That was a little more difficult," Bill admitted, "but I happen to know that this man Carney — Pete Carney — is in a class by himself."

"Because he's named 'Pete?'" scoffed Tony.

"No. Because I've played poker with him. You see, in the six years that I spent traveling around the country I met a good many professional gamblers; and Carney was one of them. I used to have a pretty good opinion of myself in those days. I changed it after I'd had a little session with Carney.

"We had just one rule: you could do whatever you pleased so long as the other fellow didn't find it out. You could use a holdout; ring in a cold deck; deal seconds; stop at nothing short of murder — if the other man didn't see it. But Carney did see it! When you played poker with Carney you played a square game. He'd catch you every time if you didn't."

"And Carney?"

"When he played with me," declared Bill, "he played according to Hoyle, too. At least, I thought so. But that didn't prevent him from cleaning me out."

"No!" ejaculated Tony.

"Pete Carney is one of the very finest poker players I've ever met. When he bets a full house, you're sure he's bluffing; and when you make up your mind that his hand is unbeatable, and lay down your own, the chances are he has nothing better than a pair."

"There's nothing to stop you from calling!"

"Nothing except what it costs. And Pete used to have one awkward habit: whenever you did call, he'd have the cards. Then you'd think twice the next time, and you'd decide there was no sense in throwing good money

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after bad, and you'd drop. And Pete would rake in the pot, and shuffle his hand into the discard, and look at you with his head cocked on one side, for all the world like an intelligent cocker spaniel, and you couldn't get mad, even if you wanted to."

Bill smiled reminiscently. "That's one reason I'm not keen on running up against Pete Carney. He's good — really good."

"Are there other reasons?"

"Just a few. He doesn't have to cheat; he can win without cheating. And he can live without winning, because an aunt of his left him a fortune a few years ago, and he's been rolling in money ever since."

"He may have spent his money."

"Not Pete."

"He may be hard up. He may be doing just what this man Graham suspects he is."

"It's out of his line. Pete feels at home in a flannel shirt, riding breeches, and puttees. If he's stopping at a swell hotel in Florida, he's there on a vacation, and that means playing cards for fun — not for business. Pete wouldn't combine the two."

"But he must have done something to make Graham write that letter."

Bill gazed at his friend thoughtfully. "Do you know Graham?"

"Never met him face to face, but I've heard a lot about him."

"For instance?"

"He's in with all the best people."

"What else?"

"He plays a good game of polo."

"Any more?"

"Nothing, except that he's probably a very nice fellow."

"Probably." Bill nodded, and began to enclose the bisected thousand-dollar bill in an envelope.

"What the devil are you doing?" demanded Tony.

"I'm sending his money back to him."

"You're not going?"

"A thousand dollars for two weeks' time? No."

"But think of the sport, man! Why, it's better than hunting big game! And just think of somebody actually giving you money to go to Florida in winter!" Tony glanced at the windows and shuddered. "By George! I'd like to go there myself."

"Why don't you?"

"Do you mean it?"

Bill glanced at him keenly. "Why not?"

"You mean, introduce myself as Bill Parmelee?"

"Only to Graham. Remember, Carney knows me."

"And then?"

"Catch Carney cheating — that's all," Bill tantalized.

"You know I can't do it!"

"I don't know anything of the kind. You've learned a lot — and you'd bring a fresh mind to the problem. You know what they say about beginner's luck."

Tony hesitated — and was lost. "Suppose," he ventured, "suppose I watch and I don't find anything wrong?"

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"You'll have a chance to try a bold bluff. Take Carney aside. Tell him you advise him to stay out of the game. I'll give even money that he follows your advice."

"He might," ruminated Tony; "he might at that! He might even confess!"

"He might," assented Bill.

The more Tony revolved the matter in his mind the more feasible it seemed. And buried somewhere deep in his soul was a craving to take the center of the stage himself; to emulate Bill's dramatic achievements.

He rose slowly, gathered his coat tightly about him, and nodded. "Bill," he said, "I'm going to sleep on it. I'll let you know what I decide to do in the morning."

Long after Tony had begun to snore the Parmelees, father and son, sat at their fireside and smiled at one another. John Parmelee had not contributed a word to the discussion, yet he had missed no detail of it.

"Well, Bill?" the father inquired at length.

"Well, dad?"

"You're very deep."

"Not too deep for you, dad."

"Not yet, anyhow." John Parmelee puffed his pipe thoughtfully. "You know, Bill, every time you show up a cheat you make up for one of the dark spots in your own career."

"I like to think that, dad."

"Otherwise I'd rather have you stick to farming."

"Same here."

For some minutes there was silence. Then John Parmelee spoke again.

"Your friend Claghorn will probably be starting in the morning."

"Probably."

John Parmelee smiled mysteriously. "And you, I take it, will be following on an afternoon train?"

Bill nodded.

Tony was in high spirits as he boarded the train. In fact, he was so buoyant that it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from breaking out into a series of triumphant Indian war whoops.

His friend, whom in his idolatrous fashion he regarded as the world's greatest authority on his peculiar subject, had admitted him to a footing of full equality; had, indeed, sent him upon a mission which he frankly admitted would call for superlative skill. The inference was clear; the pupil had learned all that the master could teach him, and Tony, who had plunged into the joyous game of exposing sharpers with his characteristic abandon, felt that he had passed the critical period of his schooling with the highest honors.

"I'll wire you and let you know how I'm getting along," he assured Bill on parting.

"That will be kind of you."

"I may trip him up right off, you know."

"You may."

"But if I don't," announced Tony, as if the idea had struck him that instant, "I'm going to spring a bold bluff. I'm going to advise him to get

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out of the game. I'm going to act just as if I had the goods on him."

"Very ingenious," murmured Bill, "very ingenious. But Tony, if you don't mind a suggestion ——"

"Well?" said Tony kindly.

"I'd stick to the bluff if I were you. Even if you think you see something wrong while the game is going on, I wouldn't say a word about it in public. I'd tell Carney — Carney only. I'd take him aside and whisper in his ear. I wouldn't try to make any sensational announcement over the card table."

Tony nodded indulgently. "You mean that you would rather not have me humiliate him. Is that the idea?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I'll do that," said Tony.

"And remember," cautioned his friend, "Carney knows Bill Parmelee — Graham doesn't. There's no harm in calling yourself Parmelee when you introduce yourself to Graham, but see that he introduces you to Carney and his friends by some other name — Tony Claghorn, for instance."

Tony grinned. "That's a good one — masquerading under my own name! By George, that's a good one!" he repeated as the full force of the idea penetrated. "Tony Claghorn — disguised as Tony Claghorn. I'll do it!" he declared. Then a sudden thought assailed him. "But if I address telegrams to Bill Parmelee, and Graham learns of it, it will be a dead give-away!"

"Of course you won't do anything so foolish," murmured Bill.

"Of course not."

"You won't address telegrams to Bill Parmelee. You will address them to John Parmelee, Bill's father. John Parmelee will naturally want to know how his son is getting along."

"Naturally. Naturally."

"And when an answer comes, signed by John Parmelee, you will know who the real sender is."

Tony nodded wisely. "Nothing could be simpler," he declared.

It was a particularly cold morning, and the ice caked upon the boards of the station platform crackled as the men marched back and forth upon it, but Tony, jubilating silently, was oblivious to such minor details as weather. He climbed into the train with great energy and waved his friend an exuberant farewell as his momentous trip commenced.

"I'm going to bring home the bacon!" he cried.

"Good boy!" Bill shouted.

Then the train slid around a curve and the sublimely ugly little station vanished.

Tony installed himself in a chair with great dignity, and frowned. Somehow a frown seemed to be in keeping with the role he had assumed. He glanced at an obese old gentleman seated across the aisle — and frowned. He observed two little girls giggling in a seat nearby — and frowned. He gazed out of the window, noticed a herd of cows — and frowned. Yet somewhere, deep, deep down, Tony Claghorn was almost ridiculously happy. He was off on high adventure;

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off on a hunt for the biggest of all big game. The sensation was delicious.

He strolled into the club car, feeling as if every eye were upon him, lighted a cigarette, and threw it away. At Pawling he bought a morning paper, glanced at the headlines, and flung that away.

He returned to his chair, and noted that his valise, conspicuously lettered with his initials, would have to be exchanged for one not so lettered. But it occurred to him also that if he, Anthony P. Claghorn, were to masquerade as Anthony P. Claghorn, the initials would be quite appropriate. Then it struck him that the lettering was obviously old, and that it might be difficult to explain to Graham why it had not been newly painted.

The problem was one which would have been of no particular importance to anyone other than Tony, but that earnest gentleman, resting his chin on the palm of his hand, gazed penetratingly out of the window and wrestled mentally with its intricate details.

He had made little headway by the time the train reached Brewster, and was nervously retracing his thoughts upon the subject for perhaps the twentieth time when White Plains appeared and disappeared. Once arrived, however, at the terminal, he marched resolutely to the telegraph office and dispatched a brief, soldierly message to one John Parmelee:

"Shall not change the initials on my suitcase period."

The reply, which reached him upon the Florida Limited that evening, consisted of a single word: "Good." And Tony exulted.

But in the interim Tony had passed several happy hours in New York. He had burst in upon his pretty wife in their comfortable apartment, and in brief, soldierly terms had explained that he was leaving for Florida.

Millie had crowed with joy. "I'll be ready in half an hour!" she declared.

In brief, soldierly terms Tony had broken the sad news to her. He was leaving on business — important business — and Millie would have to remain.

"Important business?" she had challenged. "Why, Tony dear, since when have you had any business at all?"

With impressive dignity Tony handed her Allan Graham's letter, brief and soldierly as one might desire.

She read it through and gasped.

"Why, Tony," she declared, "you're not going to try and handle this yourself!"

"That's just what I'm going to do."

"You have no chance."

"Bill doesn't think that. Bill told me to go — to introduce myself to Graham as Bill Parmelee."

"Oh!"

"If Bill says so, it's all right. Bill has confidence in me."

Now this story deals with several very deep persons. Two of them are named Parmelee; and one of them is named Mrs. Anthony P. Claghorn.

Millie corrugated her brows for a

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few seconds, smiled, and remarked, "Yes, dear."

Tony bustled about with great satisfaction. The brief, soldierly method had had its reward. "I'll be starting at once," he declared.

"We'll be starting."

"I will return in two weeks — or thereabouts."

"We will return."

Asserting his position as master of his own household, Tony explained lucidly just why it was impossible for him to invite Millie to accompany him. It was out of the question. Ridiculous. Preposterous. He forbade it.

Nevertheless when Tony boarded the Florida Limited he was preceded by a remarkably pretty young woman who remarked in the brief, soldierly manner that he so much admired, "Tony, dear, I'm going to have the time of my life!"

Tony thought it well to wire to John Parmelee: "Am taking Millie along period."

The reply reached him at Richmond. It contained a single word: "Good."

While winter seized the Connecticut hills in its grasp, while stormy winds howled, and thickly falling snowflakes covered the rolling fields, a group of men, thousands of miles away, sat in a luxuriously appointed room in the Hotel Palmetto, on the east coast of Florida, and hazarded large sums of money upon the verdict of the cards.

They wore the lightest of summer flannels and pongees, and they fanned themselves with Panama hats, for so far south cold never ventured. And being well-fed, prosperous individuals on vacations, they lived expensively, amused themselves expensively, and — gambled expensively.

Shearson, who presided over the destinies of a motor-car factory whose works covered miles, and whose employees were numbered far into the thousands, won and lost huge sums with utter indifference. The game entertained him. That was all that mattered. It never occurred to him to calculate whether, in the long run, he was a loser or a winner.

Manners, whose ancestors had bequeathed him acres of choice New York realty, admitted that his favorite game was bridge — at a tenth of a cent a point. But being agreeable, he consented to take part in daily sessions at poker, and systematically donated his profits — which were often considerable — to charity.

Haight and Marsden, who were financiers, played with nervous intensity, and frankly admitted that they enjoyed the betting because it was heavy. Unlike Manners, small stakes would never have given them a thrill. They reveled in the excitement of a game whose limit was always high, and they paid their losses with the good grace of men who have had their money's worth.

Graham and Carney completed the group. Graham, still in the early thirties, handsome, an excellent con-

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versationalist, and an adept at a dozen different kinds of sport, played with careless expertness and generally managed to come out even. A natural-born player, Shearson had called him. Never carried away by the excitement of the moment, never deluding himself into the belief that five good cards in his hand precluded an even better hand somewhere else about the table, but never hesitating to back his judgment, he fared well on the whole.

Carney seemed to fit into the group least of all. Sixty, tall, heavy, bronzed, carelessly dressed and strangely taciturn, he sucked incessantly at an unlighted cigar and glanced seldom at his cards. Instead, his deep-set eyes wandered incessantly from face to face, reading their expressions, interpreting them, while his own expression rarely changed. His hands were huge, showing the evidence of manual labor earlier in his life. Yet when it became his turn to deal they became strangely expert. Engulfing the entire pack in one of them, he would flip off the cards with amazing speed with the other. Like a rapidly moving shuttle his right hand would travel over the left. A blur — a mere blur — and the cards, in neat little piles, would be distributed about the table.

The first time Shearson, who was talkative, had watched in utter amazement. "You've played cards quite a little," he had hazarded.

"Yes, quite a little," Carney had admitted.

There were many things he might have added. Indeed, as he paused, Shearson waited expectantly for him to continue. But Carney merely nodded, as if at some recollection which he did not propose to share, and went on impassively with the game.

During the few days that the play had progressed, five of the six men had come to know each other fairly well. Each, in turn, had contributed autobiographical reminiscences to the common fund. Shearson could neither lose nor win without being reminded of a story. Manners was interested in a variety of subjects, and managed to bring them into the conversation frequently. Haight and Marsden, being connected with Wall Street, had an unfailing supply of anecdotes on tap. And Graham, who despite his youth had seen much of the world, was a brilliant talker, enlivening every conversation in which he took part with an agreeable flow of observation and comment.

Only Carney held aloof. Occasionally — but rarely — a fleeting grin broke over his features; sometimes he would even contribute a monosyllable to the talk; but never a word about himself or about his past left his lips. He had engaged an expensive room, and he spent money freely, paying his bills not by check but from a huge roll of bank notes which he excavated from a capacious pocket. But even though Shearson, in an endeavor to learn something about him, had deliberately touched on every subject in which Carney might

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have been expected to be interested, never a scrap of information resulted.

He played the game, uttering only the few words made necessary by the game itself, and he never exulted in his good fortune, though Graham, an acute observer, had noted from the very beginning that he had been a consistent winner.

"Either he's slick or he's simple," Shearson confided to Graham one evening. "There's no middle ground. Either he's got so much to say that he doesn't want to start, or he's got nothing to say at all. I can't make him out."

Graham had very definite conclusions of his own, but felt it best not to mention them. Instead, he kept his belief strictly to himself until an important young man whom he had never met before took up his residence in the hotel, and somewhat melodramatically introduced himself to Graham by presenting the half of a thousand-dollar bill.

Tony had expended much thought upon this detail. Its effect was as electric as he had hoped.

"So you're the man I've been expecting?" Graham exclaimed.

Tony bowed with dignity. "Yes," he murmured.

"Fine!" declared Graham. "Come up to my room and we'll have a chat."

Once in privacy, with the door bolted, Graham turned cordially to the traveler. "Light a cigar, Mr. Parmelee," he invited, "make yourself comfortable."

Tony, exulting in his role, lit one of his host's Havanas, crossed his long legs, folded his arms, and adopted a profoundly serious expression. "Proceed, Mr. Graham," he commanded.

"In the first place, you will notice I didn't call you 'Mr. Parmelee' in the lobby. You may not know it, but you have become an exceedingly well-known man."

"Quite so," murmured Tony.

"I would even suggest — if you approve — that you pass under some other name while you are here."

"I have registered as Anthony P. Claghorn — and wife," Tony mentioned.

"Clever — very clever."

"Even the initials on my suit case correspond."

"And the initials on your handkerchief," pointed out his observant host.

Tony bore the shock well. He glanced at the monogrammed corner of linen which protruded from his outside breast pocket, and nodded. "I believe in being thorough," he proclaimed. For the fraction of a second he thought of mentioning that his hose, his underwear, and his pajamas were embroidered with the same initials, but he thought better of it. "I do everything thoroughly," he repeated.

"So I see. I take it that you're acquainted with Claghorn?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because it might be awkward if Claghorn showed up here. You see, Anthony P. Claghorn is a real person."

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"Of course he's a real person!" declared Tony. "That's why I borrowed his name. And he won't show up here either. I saw him in New York before I left, and I arranged that with him."

"Excellent! Excellent! Now, to begin with, I keep my promises." From a wallet Graham extracted half of a thousand-dollar bill, fitted it to the half which Tony had brought as his introduction, and handed both halves to him. "I wrote that this would be yours when you arrived. Here you are. This is your retainer."

"Thank you," said Tony gravely. It was with a thrill which he hoped his exterior concealed that he pocketed the note.

"It is only a sample of what you will get if you are successful."

"I am always successful," Tony murmured modestly.

"So I have heard. That is why I sent for you. Now, as to this man Carney ——"

"Pete Carney."

"You know him?"

"I know of him."

"What do you know?"

Magisterially Tony waved his hand. "Proceed!"

Graham nodded. "Very well, Mr. Parmelee. Handle this your own way. All I can tell you is that I think Carney cheats."

"You wrote that."

"Yes."

"What makes you think that?"

Graham, as previously mentioned, was an excellent conversationalist, and after one hour's uninterrupted speech he was still holding forth volubly.

Tony finally called a halt. "From what you have said, I gather that you *think* Carney cheats."

Graham gasped, but found the strength to reply, "Yes."

Gravely Tony helped himself to another of his host's excellent cigars.

"We shall see what we shall see," he declared.

Now a game entered into for the sake of a little diversion, and a game entered into in the hope of catching one of the participants in the act of cheating, are two different things. Tony hoped that his calm exterior concealed the agitation of his feelings.

The six men, welcoming a seventh, had allowed him to buy a stack of chips, and had observed his play with visible interest. Tony, watching Carney with eagle eyes, hypnotized by the expertness which his victim-to-be displayed in his dealing, hardly did himself justice.

At his best he played a game which might have been described as passable; did not too often bet heavily on filling a straight open in the middle, and realized, more or less dimly, that a lone ace did not possess enough magnetism to attract three others to it on the draw. But in the company in which he found himself, Tony, it must be admitted regretfully, did not even shine faintly. It was disconcerting, for one thing, to find the players betting with consistent liberality; to discover that Shearson and Carney,

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between them, made it exceedingly expensive to draw cards. Tony, like most indifferent players, was addicted to calling. Shearson and Carney, having had more experience, backed their faith in their cards by raising, and allowed their opponents to call. Now it is an old adage that a good caller is a sure loser, and in less than an hour Tony found it necessary to invest in a second stack of chips.

Graham glanced at him keenly, but Tony shook his head ever so slightly. Had he spoken he would doubtless have remarked: "Don't worry. Everything is going according to plan." That may or may not have explained how the second stack went the way of the first in record-breaking time.

Tony had begun the session with an intense desire to catch Carney in an act of dishonesty. Halfway through, this desire faded insensibly into the background and was replaced by an earnest wish not to allow himself to be utterly wiped out. He began to play more conservatively, and had the utterly miserable sensation that his opponents were reading his thoughts with the greatest ease. Shearson, who had raised with magnificent liberality earlier in the evening, gazed at Tony searchingly, and dropped more than once when Tony, holding big hands, was depending upon him to make the pot worthwhile. Carney, too, who had carried the art of bluff to incredible heights, seemed to sense the value of the cards which occasionally came to Tony, and contributed next to nothing. And Manners, Haight, and Marsden, taking their cue from Shearson and Carney, the sensational players, put on a soft pedal, and allowed Tony's streaks of luck to pass without serious damage to their pocketbooks.

In desperation Tony began to bluff, and found himself once more in deep water. He resorted to the ruses which had worked so well at the Himalaya Club, in far-off New York; but his opponents, following the lead of Shearson and Carney, were never embarrassed by them. According to the best writers on the subject of poker, the other players should have laid down their hands, and permitted Tony to rake in a pot. Evidently they had not heard of the best writers, for they simply raised, and punctured Tony's bluffs in short order.

At eleven thirty the game broke up, Tony, to his chagrin having lost not only the thousand he had received from Graham, but some hundreds of his own funds as well.

His employer buttonholed him in a corridor.

"Well?" he demanded.

Tony waved a hand. "I have made progress," he announced vaguely.

"I should say so!" assented Graham. "You've lost at the rate of sixty miles an hour! If you keep on progressing that way you'll ——"

Tony interrupted with dignity. "I am handling this affair in my own way," he declared. "If I had won, Carney might have become suspicious. As it is — as it is ——"

"As it is?"

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"I have laid the groundwork for my future actions."

Graham gazed at him with an unfriendly eye. "You know," he commented, "that time you raised on a bobtail flush ——"

Again Tony interrupted. "I had my reasons, Mr. Graham. Excellent reasons."

"Carney didn't even call you that time," persisted Graham; "he raised you back, and kept on raising. And at the finish, *you* called — not Carney. That may be advanced poker, but if it is, it is so advanced that I don't understand it. If you weren't an expert, Mr. Parmelee, I'd call it sheer lunacy. What did you expect to find in Carney's hand? Another bobtail flush? If that was it, you must have been disappointed when he laid down a full house, queens high."

Tony laid a forefinger at the side of his nose in an inscrutable gesture. "Ah, ha!" he exclaimed, and again, "Ah, ha!"

Then, with great dignity, he moved away.

Wandering through the dark corridors of the hotel, he gave himself up to painful thought. He had discovered absolutely nothing, with the exception of the fact that Carney, as Bill had warned him, was an extraordinarily fine player. He had entered the game with a light heart, buoyed up by too-great confidence in his own ability. He had left it separated from most of his available cash, and the progress which he had reported to Graham was wholly imaginary.

In his dilemma he woke up his sleeping wife and threw himself upon her mercy.

She listened attentively.

"If I understand you, Tony dear," she commented, "you haven't made much headway."

"None at all," Tony confessed.

"And you've lost a good deal of money."

"Too much."

"And you want to know what I would do next?"

"Yes."

Millie smiled. As previously remarked, Mrs. Anthony P. Claghorn was an exceedingly deep person. "Tony, dear," she advised, "I would do just what you think you ought to do. That's what Bill wants, isn't it?"

"Er — yes."

"Well, go ahead."

Tony gazed at the ceiling thoughtfully. "When I left Bill, I told him that even if I didn't catch Carney in the act I'd go ahead just as if I had the goods on him: I'd take him aside, and advise him to get out of the game."

"And what did Bill say?"

"He thought that was a good idea of mine. He approved of it."

"Then I approve of it also," murmured pretty Mrs. Claghorn, turned over, and soon was fast asleep.

For half an hour Tony wrestled silently with his thoughts. Then he made his way to the telegraph office and dispatched a wire: "Am ready to proceed with second part of plan period."

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The reply was handed to him at breakfast. It was one word: "Good."

Enthusiasm, perhaps, was Mr. Anthony P. Claghorn's most marked characteristic. It was not congenial to his volcanic nature to indulge in patience; to wait for a propitious moment; to underrate his own abilities. Tony had an incurable habit of going off at half-cock, and while eating his breakfast he repented of it.

With his customary headstrong energy he had thoughtlessly committed himself to a course of action from which there was no retreat, had determined to beard the lion Carney in his den, and had made his decision irrevocable by telegraphing it to his friend. He had sent off the wire in moderately high spirits. Ten minutes later it had suddenly struck him that Carney, with a Western upbringing and with a lifetime spent in the company of men notoriously quick on the trigger, might not receive Tony's gentle hint to retire from the game in a truly Christian spirit. That, Tony foresaw, might be awkward.

During the night — for he had slept but little — he had mentally pictured the possibilities. He visioned himself walking up to Carney, speaking a single sentence — and he saw Carney, with a lightninglike movement, drawing a revolver and shooting him dead on the spot. That nightmare had wakened him all of three or four times in as many hours.

He had heard tales about the quaint habits said to be characteristic of old-time mining camps. It occurred to him that Carney, instead of shooting him, might insert an expert thumb into Tony's orbit and gouge out an eye. Tony shuddered, patted his optic thoughtfully, and admitted that it felt more at home in its socket.

Visions of bowie knives, of amputated ears and noses, even of captives burned at the stake, haunted his sleep. And his breakfast, which he always enjoyed, suddenly became unpalatable when Carney marched massively into the dining room, seated himself at a nearby table, and nodded. There was grimness in that nod, Tony decided, and his heart quaked.

Furtively he glanced at his pretty wife, busy with her grapefruit, and reflected uncomfortably that she would look well in mourning — yet he was conscious of no desire to hasten the coming of that event.

With calculating eyes he appraised Carney's bulk — the powerful muscles — the heavy-boned frame. The enormous hands, each large enough to engulf a pack of cards, might, before the day was over, be fastened about Tony's throat. He recalled Carney's amazing dexterity in dealing, and wondered if, in true Western fashion, he fired from the hip with equal expertness.

Tony cleared his throat.

"Millie!"

"Yes, dear."

"You're fond of me, aren't you?"

"Yes, dear."

"Very?"

"Yes, dear."

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"That's good," remarked Tony, and reflected that it was nice to know that he would be missed.

He finished his breakfast without another word, and on leaving the dining room came face to face with Graham. This latter drew him into a corner. "Mr. Parmelee," he whispered, "if you don't mind, I'd like to know something about your plans for today."

Tony was not in the best of humors. "I do mind," he retorted.

Graham was imperturbable. "In that event, Mr. Parmelee," he whispered, "I might as well tell you that I've been doing some thinking. Deliver the goods — deliver them any way you please — and you'll find me liberal — more than liberal. But if you take a hand in the game again, and if you lose again, please bear in mind that I am not staking you. I'd like that clearly understood, Mr. Parmelee."

Tony glared at him. "I am fully able to pay my own losses, Mr. Graham."

"I am glad to hear that," said Graham, and walked away.

Disconsolately Tony proceeded to the veranda and slumped into a chair. Much as he would have liked to appeal to Bill for help his pride prevented him from doing so. Then he turned his head and discovered that Carney, well fed and at peace with the world after an excellent breakfast, had installed himself in a chair not six inches distant from his own.

It was Tony's opportunity to remark manfully, "Mr. Carney, queer things were happening in that game last night. I don't want to accuse you of anything, but I do want to advise you to stay out of it."

He said nothing of the kind. Instead, he smiled in a friendly manner, though his heart was beating rapidly, and mumbled "G'morning."

"Good morning," Carney replied.

"Nice weather," Tony opined, and Carney agreed with that opinion. "Been here long?" Tony inquired, and Carney grunted.

"Umph."

Then, for ten minutes at least, neither spoke, while Carney sucked at an unlighted cigar and the young man at his side wondered whether he weighed over or under two hundred and thirty pounds.

Presently Carney, the silent, began to speak. "Nice, quiet game last night," he remarked in his deep, bass voice.

"Yes. Wasn't it?"

"Different from the games I used to sit in when I was your age, bub."

"How so?" inquired Tony.

"Quieter — much quieter," said Carney with a reminiscent smile. "In those days, when you sat down, you never knew if you'd get up again. You kept your shooting irons handy, bub."

Tony swallowed two or three times, and nodded. Here, again, he observed methodically, was an opportunity to warn Carney, in a firm, decisive manner, that it would be well for

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him to retire from the game. But Tony let the opportunity pass.

During the day Carney seemed to dog his footsteps. Wherever Tony wandered, Carney was never far distant. He met him on a walk — and again on the veranda upon his return from it — and found him within easy speaking distance in the dining room at lunch. When he adjourned to a quiet corner for an after-dinner smoke the big Westerner was not far away.

"Upon my word," Tony whispered to his wife, "I believe he's following me around!"

"Have you spoken to him yet?" she whispered back.

"No."

"Why not?"

Now Tony was no coward. Being a reasonable man, he had estimated the prospective risks, and considering them great, had avoided them. But with his wife forcing his hand that course was no longer possible.

"I'm going to speak to him this minute!" he declared.

He rose, straightened his coat, and threw out his shoulders. If he were to die, an heroic death, with his wife on the spot to appreciate his heroism, would be most satisfactory.

He marched across the veranda, pulled up a chair next to Carney's, and plumped himself into it.

"Mr. Carney," he said, "I want to talk to you."

"Yes, bub?" The tone was incredibly mild.

Tony felt encouraged. "I was watching the game last night," he declared resolutely. "I took a hand just to watch."

"Yes, bub?"

Tony sensed that he was at the edge of the precipice. He leaped over with a rush. "If you know what's good for you, you'll get out of that game."

The die was cast. Tony waited with an oddly impersonal curiosity. Would Carney draw a knife or a revolver? Or would his thumb seek Tony's eyeball?

None of these things happened. Instead, the bronzed Westerner inclined his head ever so slightly, and murmured, "Yes, bub."

Tony gasped. "You heard what I said?" he demanded incredulously.

"Yes, bub."

"And you'll quit the game?"

"I sure will."

Like wine Carney's unexpected meekness went to Tony's head. "I said nothing last night," he declared, "because I didn't want to humiliate you before the others. But now we're alone and I can say what I think. If you know what's good for you, don't let me catch you in that game again!"

"I won't," Carney promised.

With dignity Tony rose. "That's all," he informed his victim, and stalked off. Victory was his, and he felt just a trifle delirious.

As he turned the corner of the veranda Graham came to him with outstretched hands. "Mr. Parmelee," declared that young man, "I apologize — I apologize most humbly. I

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overheard every word you said to Carney, and every word he said to you. You have done what I asked you to do, and I'm eternally obliged."

Tony waved a deprecating hand. "Don't mention it," he murmured.

Graham seized him by the arm. "I told you that you'd find me liberal, and I'm going to prove it. Come inside, Mr. Parmelee, and watch me cash a check."

It would be pleasant to end this story at this point. It would be pleasant to relate that Tony marched into the telegraph office, reported the success of his mission, received the answer, "Good," and returned home covered with glory.

But in the interests of veracity, it is necessary to detail the events which took place after Tony, in brief, soldierly fashion, had indited that final telegram: "We have met the enemy and they are ours exclamation point."

Half an hour earlier the world had been overcast with gloom for Tony; a leaden gray pall had hung thick upon everything. But in the twinkling of an eye the mists had lifted and rosy tints had come in their stead. Success had come — overwhelming success — and Tony basked in its effulgence.

In company with his pretty wife he proceeded to the beach and enjoyed a swim. He felt entitled to relaxation after his labors. He splashed around merrily until a porpoise-like blowing warned him of the approach of some large animal. Then he turned, and to his boundless amazement discovered Carney, in a trim bathing suit, disporting himself near him.

Now according to all the rules of etiquette, Carney, being an exposed sharper, should have avoided the presence of his conqueror and should have fled from his sight like a thing accursed. But Carney, evidently, possessed no sense of shame, for he swam nearer, turned gayly on his back, and called out a greeting.

Tony replied — he could do no less — and when Carney offered to race him back did not see his way clear to refuse. Nor could he decline when Carney, having won the race hands down for all his sixty years, invited him to help sample the contents of a pinch bottle which the Westerner had thriftily buried near an abandoned hut.

During twenty-four hours Tony's opinion of Carney had fluctuated widely; and it fluctuated still more after a few swallows of an amber-colored liquid had gurgled down Tony's throat. Somehow Tony's vision began to clear. He feared he had overlooked Carney's good qualities, such as they were; and that fear became a certainty before the bottle was emptied.

"Good stuff," Tony remarked, smacking his lips critically.

"None better," Carney assented.

"But there's not much left in the bottle," Tony pointed out in alarm.

"'Sall right, bub," said the Westerner, "there's more where this came from." He glanced around to make

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sure that he was not overheard. "How'd you like to meet me in my room tonight?"

"What for?"

"Well, if we're not going to play cards," grinned Carney, "time will be hanging heavy on our hands, and I've got a little valise — not too little — with several more bottles in it." He placed a hairy paw on Tony's knee as that worthy deliberated. "Bub, I've got a cocktail shaker, and we'll send down for some ice and a couple of limes, and I'll mix you something that you've never tasted in your life!"

When the next book on etiquette is written, the authority responsible for it will doubtless state the correct procedure for a young man confronted with a situation of this kind. Tony, somewhat mellowed by the excellent whisky he had drunk, reflected that Carney's invitation indicated a spirit of forgiveness as remarkable as it was praiseworthy.

He, Tony, had humiliated Carney as much as one man may humiliate another, had accused him of cheating, and had ordered him out of the game. Yet Carney, far from harboring the slightest ill will, had accepted his chastisement meekly, and was making unmistakable overtures of friendship to his former enemy.

Under the circumstances Tony could not very well show himself less magnanimous than his victim.

"I'm with you, daddy," he remarked with simple elegance, dressed, hastened through his supper, made a satisfactory excuse to his wife, and presently rejoined the convivial Westerner.

It became speedily apparent that Carney had not exaggerated in describing the little — not too little — valise. Tony had never seen another like it. The sides, fitted with nickel-plated racks, held a bewildering array of gayly colored bottles. Every ingredient of every known beverage was present in proper proportions.

Carney set the valise upright on a convenient table, removed his coat, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

"Bub," he confessed, "long, long before you were born, I used to tend bar. The drinks are on me. What will you have?"

Tony sighed blissfully. "A Martini," he murmured.

"Martini it is."

The hands which dealt so wonderfully were even more expert with a cocktail shaker. In an incredibly short space of time two glasses, filled to the brim with an ice-cold concoction, made their appearance. Tony quaffed his slowly and appreciatively.

"Daddy," he remarked, "you don't mind if I call you daddy?"

"Not at all."

"Very well, then. Daddy, you're a great man."

Carney bowed. "What will it be now?"

"Have you the makings of a Clover Club?"

"That — and anything else," Carney assured him.

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The Clover Club was followed by a Manhattan — and a Bronx, which Tony encored enthusiastically — and an absinthe frappé — and then Carney introduced his guest to the alcoholic mystery known as a stinger.

Now there are stingers and stingers, and their formulas vary widely, but Carney, so he modestly confessed, knew the formula of the one prehistoric, primeval, protoplasmic stinger from which all other stingers are descended. He demonstrated.

"Do you like it?" he inquired.

"'Sgood," commented Tony blissfully, "'sawfully good. 'Swonderful!"

Carney must have had a stomach of cast iron, for he matched his guest, glass for glass, and remained wholly unaffected. But Tony, being a younger man, and having had less experience, became mellower and mellower.

At ten he swore undying friendship with Carney. Carney had not asked him to do so, but Tony felt it was in order.

"There's so much bad in the worst of us, and so much good in the best of us," he misquoted happily, "that means you, daddy."

Carney bowed — both of him, Tony noticed. It struck Tony suddenly that here was an excellent opportunity to reform the old man, and he turned his forceful energies to it. He paused occasionally for refreshment, for his throat became dry at frequent intervals, but he noted with pleasure how respectfully Carney listened to what, by Tony's own confession immediately afterward, had been one of the most eloquent and moving sermons ever delivered.

Its effectiveness was demonstrable, for Carney professed his reform at two-minute intervals beginning at ten thirty. Tony was affected — almost to tears. And at eleven o'clock he prevailed upon Carney, who was himself beginning to show the influence of his potations, to accompany him downstairs to the card room, there to make public profession of his repentance.

"Come with me, brother — I mean daddy," urged Tony.

Navigating unsteadily, clinging to each other on the general principle that in union there is strength, the two made their way through the endless corridors, and pushed open the door beyond which the nightly session was in progress.

Around the circular table were seated Shearson, Manners, Haight, Marsden, and Graham. And Tony blinked in utter astonishment as in a sixth chair he discerned his good friend, Bill Parmelee.

"Bill," he gasped, "is that you?"

"You bet it is!" declared the apparition

"Well, if it is," commented Tony, accepting the incredible fact with good grace, "I'm mighty glad to see you. Bill, I want to introduce my friend Mr. Carney. He may be a card cheat, but he's the right sort."

Bill laughed shortly, and rose from the table. "And I," he declared, "I want to introduce Mr. Allan Graham.

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He's a card cheat — the only one in this room — and he's the wrong sort."

Graham's face, distorted with fury, was a confession for anybody to read.

Tony pinched himself. "Graham? Not Carney?" he queried.

"Exactly."

Tony glanced around the room. In his befuddled condition he had not noticed the deathlike silence of the men who sat at the table. Shearson's features, usually so genial, had become set and stern. Manners, generally so dapper and smiling, was quiet — ominously quiet. And Haight and Marsden, with compressed lips, wore the expression of jurors about to convict a criminal upon a capital charge.

Though Tony did not sense it, he had burst into the room but an instant after Parmelee had unveiled the sharper.

He gazed incredulously from face to face. The unexpected revelation had nearly sobered him.

"Graham? Not Carney?" he repeated stupidly.

"Graham — not Carney," echoed Bill.

Impulsively Tony flung his arm about the big Westerner's shoulders. "If that's so," he declared, "I'm satisfied with life!"

It was not until noon the next day that Bill made any attempt to answer the many questions that had been hurled at him. It was not until then that Tony was in a condition either to ask questions or to understand the replies, and Bill felt that his friend was entitled to a little enlightenment.

"I had my first suspicions," Bill explained, "the moment I saw Graham's letter, and read that he wanted me to come here and show up Pete Carney as a card cheat. That was suspicious — very suspicious — because I know Pete as I know myself, and I was willing to stake my life that he wasn't cheating."

Carney, who was listening, smiled broadly. "You were taking a big chance, weren't you, Bill?"

"Not even a little one!" Bill declared. "I knew you had turned over a new leaf, Pete, and I had faith in you. Aside from that," Bill added with a chuckle, "I knew that it wouldn't take you more than one or two sittings to clean up everything in sight; that is, if you really wanted to, and didn't care how you did it. It was a big game — a game which justifies a man in tearing a thousand-dollar bill in two, and mailing me one of the halves must be a big game — and if you were winning so slowly that Graham had the time to write me, and the further time to await my arrival from Connecticut, it was a fair inference that you were playing honest poker."

Shearson, another listener, nodded. "That sounds reasonable," he admitted.

"I began to ask myself questions," pursued Parmelee, turning to Tony, "the moment you placed that letter in my hands. Why did Graham want

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Carney convicted of cheating? To recover losses? No. If he had lost heavily he wouldn't have been able to spare a thousand-dollar bill. Did he have a grudge against Carney? Not likely. Nobody, in all the years I knew him, ever had a grudge against Pete.

"Then what other reason could there be? The solution came to me like a flash as I looked into the fire with the letter in my hand. This man Graham, for private reasons of his own, wanted Carney removed from the game! It was the only possible, the only logical explanation.

"Perhaps Graham actually thought that Carney cheated; perhaps he thought me so clever that I would prove he cheated whether he cheated or not; perhaps he had found out something about Carney's past. Pete used to be a pretty well-known figure; there's no telling what Graham had heard.

"In any event, it was clear the moment I studied Graham's letter that he wanted to get rid of Carney, and wanted to get him out of the game because he cramped his style. He had learned enough about Carney to be sure that Pete would catch him like a shot if he, Graham, ever tried anything underhand.

"That was what I read between the lines of Graham's letter."

Tony whistled. "The letter was three or four lines long, and may have consisted of twenty-four words!"

Bill smiled. "It wasn't what he wrote — it was what he didn't write — that really mattered. I did some fast thinking during the next few minutes, Tony.

"What was I to do? My first impulse was to forget it; to return the torn money to Graham and burn the letter. Carney was amply able to look out for himself — that I knew.

"My second impulse was to mail the letter to Pete, and to tell him to punch Graham's head. That would have served him right.

"But then it struck me that if I refused to help Graham, he might think up some other devilish scheme, and I didn't like the idea of old Pete fighting an enemy who was as contemptible as that.

"I made up my mind to give Graham a fair chance — to remove Carney from the game and see what Graham would do then. In a big game cheating would be worth while. I decided to give Graham plenty of rope. Perhaps he'd hang himself with it. Perhaps he'd show that I had misjudged him. I was curious to know the answer.

"So I sent you ahead, Tony, to masquerade as Bill Parmelee — and I followed you just twelve hours later."

Tony gazed at his friend in amazement. "If you followed me, who answered my telegrams?"

"My father."

"How did he know what to answer?"

Bill grinned. "Before I left, I told him that no matter what you wired, he was to answer 'Good.' It may have

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been mean, Tony, old fellow, but I didn't dare let you into the secret. You're not a good actor. You might have given it away.

"I knew you wouldn't catch Carney cheating," pursued Bill. "There were two excellent reasons. In the first place, he wasn't cheating; and in the second place, if he had been, you would never have detected him at it. I'm fairly good with the cards myself, but Pete is a real artist. He can do anything with them, except make them talk. So when you suggested — it was your suggestion, Tony, and I give you credit for it —," Bill fabricated generously, "that you spring a bold bluff on him, tell him to get out of the game as if you had actually caught him, I agreed with you right off — though I did write Pete a letter, telling him what was afoot, simply to make sure that he wouldn't wipe you off of the face of the earth as soon as he understood what you were driving at. Pete's an old friend, and I knew he'd follow instructions to the letter."

Carney grinned reminiscently. "It took him all morning to get up enough nerve to speak to me."

"But he did!"

"He did," Carney admitted, "he stood right up to me. Bub, did you know that men have been shot for doing less than that?"

Tony was silent, but his wife spoke for him. "He knew it, and I knew it too," she asserted, "because the night before he could talk of nothing else in his sleep!"

Carney gasped. "And knowing that, ma'am, you let him walk up to me?"

Pretty Mrs. Claghorn smiled. "Mr. Parmelee approved — and I knew that if Mr. Parmelee approved, it would be all right."

It was Tony's turn to gasp. "Bill," he declared, "if she had the faith in me that she has in you ——"

"Go on, Mr. Parmelee," urged Shearson.

Bill nodded. "I lay low and waited — waited for the psychological moment. When Carney took Claghorn upstairs to sample his good liquor, I took Carney's place in the game. That was easy," he explained. "I struck up an acquaintance with Mr. Shearson and he invited me right in.

"I couldn't wait. I didn't dare wait. If Graham was planning anything, he would begin right away. As a matter of fact, the fireworks started within ten minutes."

"What did he do?" inquired Carney.

"He used a shading box, Pete," said Bill, producing an implement the size of a large button from his pocket. For the benefit of the others, he demonstrated. "A shading box holds a bit of colored paste — in here — and it comes out through this slot in the top. That's all there is to it, except that the man who uses one rubs his thumb over the slot now and then, and marks the backs of the cards with it. The boxes come in pairs, one red and one blue, so that he can match the color printed on

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the backs of any deck. The least little spot will tell him all he wants to know, and it's mighty hard for anybody else to detect unless like me, you're looking for it. I waited until he won his first fat pot, and then I spoke right out in meeting."

Shearson laughed. "And then he tried to prove you were the cheat!"

"It would have been awkward," Bill admitted, "if we hadn't found the shading boxes tightly sewed to the under side of Graham's vest."

Carney broke a long silence. "He knew better than to try that when I was in the game."

"That's why he wanted you out of it."

Carney smiled grimly. "He got his wish. Much good it did him!"

But pretty Mrs. Claghorn corrugated her brow. "Answer me one question, Mr. Parmelee."

"A dozen if you like, ma'am."

"What has Tony had to do with all this? What has Tony accomplished?"

"A great deal," Bill assured her.

"I wonder! You wanted Mr. Carney out of the game. A letter to him brought that about. You wanted to sit in the game yourself. You did, didn't you? Where does Tony figure?"

"He threw Graham off of the trail."

"That could have been done in a dozen other ways."

Bill grinned. "You're too clever for me, ma'am. Much too clever! You see, Tony was spending a weekend with me when Graham's letter arrived; and Tony couldn't talk about anything but the snow — and the ice — and the cold. And something told me — something told me ——"

"That he might enjoy a Florida vacation?"

"Ma'am," said Bill with a bow, "I never could lie to a lady."

"Q"

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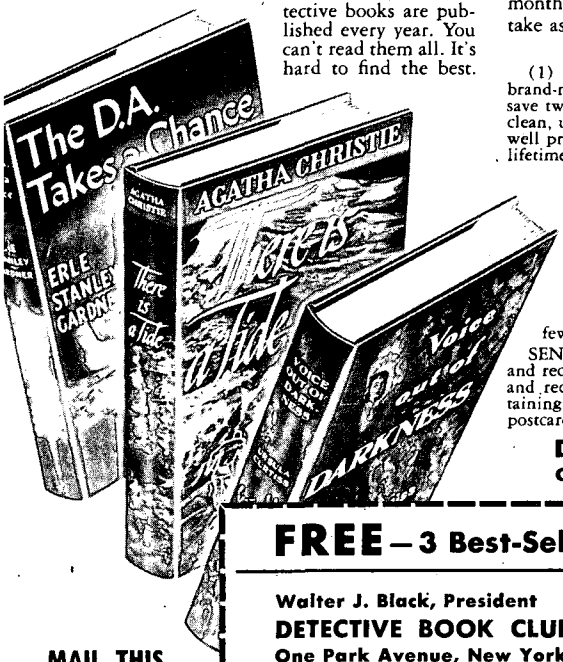

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